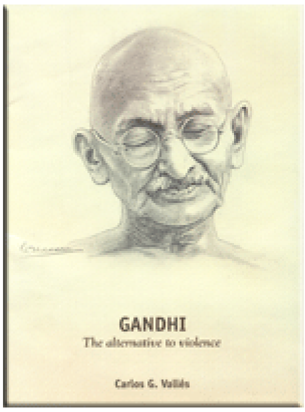
GANDHI – The alternative to violence



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01. LESSON NUMBER FOUR

A little anecdote to set the reading mood. I was once on a visit to a friend's family in Ahmedabad, when this little but telling incident took place before everybody present. The child of the family came in from school with a classmate, and both sat down on the floor before all of us to do their homework together as their daily task before going out to play. We elders continued with our conversation and our tea while the two small scholars, oblivious to the audience, opened their textbooks and started turning pages, pointing at passages, and writing notes. Mathematics, physics, grammar, history seemed all to form part of their curriculum, and they read out questions and formulated answers by turn in close partnership. In the midst of their research, one of them asked the other a question: "Who was Gandhi?"

I pricked my ears. Obviously there had been a lesson about Mahatma Gandhi in the classroom and they had been asked to look the matter up in their textbook. Together with the mathematics problems, the grammar parsing, and the history dates, kings and battles, they had to check on that character of history and write an essay about him. That was when one of the boys looked up and asked the other, "Who was Gandhi?" The other boy, without looking up from his notebook, just pointed at the textbook in front and answered matter-of-factly: "Lesson number four." And both went on with their homework. I stopped paying attention to the grown-ups' conversation.

Gandhi? Lesson number four. That was all those two young boys new about him. And that was India, was Gujarat, was Ahmedabad not so many years after Gandhi's death. They were speaking in Gujarati which was Gandhi's mother tongue. Their parents had been contemporaries of Gandhi, had seen him in person, had heard him and had heard about him, had read news of him in the papers, had followed his work day by day, had recognised his figure, had loved him, had been thrilled by his presence and shaken by his death. He had been for them a living person who had walked on the land they were walking on, had breathed the air they were breathing, had spoken the language they were

speaking. That was Gandhi for their parents. But for their children, Gandhi was none of that any more. He was just a character in history, a memory of the past, a chapter in a textbook. A topic for study, a question for an examination, a bit of homework. Maybe in the same textbook there was a lesson on Ashoka, on Alexander the Great, on Napoleon. And among them, Gandhi. Lesson number four. For those two smart and dutiful boys, Gandhi, in his own country and province and in his own time, had ceased to be a living presence and had become a page in a textbook. And they were not aware of the loss.

Precisely the importance of Gandhi for us is that he belongs to our times. He was the first great modern statesman who dealt with the problems that have become the burden of our age, world poverty, the gap between the rich and the poor, terrorism, ethnic wars, oppression, corruption, East and West, North and South, religious intolerance, violence. He fought for the great ideals we are now fighting for: freedom and equality, friendship and dignity, individual welfare and social progress. And, above all, he taught and showed to all his great lifelong lesson, which is also our greatest need, that the real battles of history are those won without an army, that the greatest force is soul- force, that freedom is not obtained through violence. His "holding-on-to-truth" *(satyagraha)* is the only and real way to obtain lasting peace, and that is his great contribution to history and to world-peace at a moment when we need it most.

Gandhi achieved, for the first time in history, the independence of a great country from a great empire without waging a war of independence. Up to his day, colonies in America and Asia had won independence from the colonising powers in Europe, but never without a war. Even in India, some political and military leaders like Nehru, Patel and Subhash Chandra Bose thought an armed uprising would be necessary and a war would have to be waged to free India from Britain. But Gandhi prevailed, and won. He achieved independence through peaceful means. That was a landmark in history. After him and through his example, many more countries in Asia and Africa did gradually become

independent without a war, and this is precisely Gandhi's vital contribution to the history of the human race. Freedom without war.

War has since acquired a new version in terrorism, which is the blot on the history of our times. A war without frontiers, without enlisted armies, without open battles, but a war with weapons, with victims, with destruction, with blood. A daily war without battlefields and without dates, without a noble cause or heroic patriotism, without courage and without honour. Nothing but the reign of violence and the media reports of it, while the news of the latest terrorist attack renews in us the sense of hopelessness we experience before the plague of our days. How to stop terrorism?

The urgent need is to develop a strategy of non-violence to return humankind to its senses. To learn the ways of non-violence and practice its doctrine. And Gandhi was the great expert in that new discipline. The name of Gandhi lives anonymously in every peaceful protest, in every peace march, in every peace treaty and peace manifesto, in every friendly meeting between opposing parties, in every white flag and in every human handshake. It will be worth our while to watch his career, to study his teaching, to enjoy his anecdotes, to listen to his words, to learn from his example.

Let's start with lesson number four.

02. THE SHY PLEADER

A primary school student's memories:

At school I learned with difficulty some multiplication tables. What I did learn very soon from other students was bad words to refer to the teacher, and I don't remember anything else. I draw the conclusion that my understanding was mediocre, and my memory as thin as a biscuit.

Later in high school:

Here some of the subjects were taught in English. I didn't understand a word. In geometry I managed to reach theorem number 12 of Euclid. The geometry master was considered a good teacher, but I hardly understood anything. I often felt desperate.

And at college:

Here I couldn't follow anything at all. In class I had no notion what was going on, and was not interested in it at all. The blame was not the professors', was mine. I was very dull.

In the Shamaldas College of Bhavnagar, Gujarat, they show to visitors today the records of the examination results of the first semester examination in which this student appeared. I have seen that record with my own eyes. In the midst of a long list of names, today entirely forgotten, written in longhand with a steady and uniform type of letter, is the full name of the student in question here. Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi. And after that name, in four columns, come the results he had obtained in the four subjects he had sat for. In the first one he passes, in the second he fails, and for the third and fourth... he was absent. His first examination results at the University confirmed the low opinion that student had of himself.

In the second semester that year, his family found a chance to send him to continue his studies in England. They asked him whether he was ready to go to England that same year, and this was his answer:

"It'll be fine to go to England this year, because here I'm not going to pass the exam anyhow."

Quite a good reason to go to England! Here I'm sure to fail, so do send me abroad and we'll see how I manage there. Thus the impending danger is avoided. Escapism. Avoiding a crisis by running away. This is just the opposite of what this student will do when he grows up; he'll never escape a crisis, but will meet it frontally and will overcome it. He'll have to change a great deal to reach that new attitude. For the present we'll follow him in his vicissitudes as a student.

Not only was he of mediocre intelligence but, always according to him, he was weak in body and shy in character. He was so shy that, in spite of the fact that he loved cricket as all Indian boys do, he never played, since in order to play he would have to speak to others and join a team, and his shyness prevented him from doing that.

This is a strange trait in a person who will later face viceroys and address crowds. Back from England, and ready with his law degree, he joined the Bombay High Court to work as a lawyer and earn his livelihood. But he didn't last long. Here is his experience in his first court case as he himself tells it with his usual simplicity and sincerity:

It was the first time I was going to the court. I was the prosecution lawyer and I had to question the accused. I had prepared all the questions for a purely routine questioning. I stood up and my legs started trembling. My head was spinning and I thought it was the hall that was going round and round. I couldn't even ask the first question. I remained standing, dumb and trembling like a leaf. The judge must have laughed, and the lawyers must have amused themselves at my expense. But I could not see or hear anything. I didn't even know where I was. At last I sat down. I told my client I couldn't represent him, and I gave him back the fee he had paid me. Then I got out in a hurry. I don't know whether my client won or lost the case. I was thoroughly ashamed of myself. There itself I decided not to come back to the court until I could have some self- confidence. Such a decision was unnecessary, anyhow, as nobody

was going to entrust me with a case, since I was sure to lose it. That was the beginning of my career as a lawyer.

Such was Gandhi's professional beginning. The mediocre student and the shy lawyer. This is the history of the valuable years of his youth as told by himself. As he later recollected his life with the serenity and humour age and success had given him, he summed up thus that lost period: "I found myself as a newly married girl who has just gone to live with her in-laws." The "joint family" way of life implies that the son, on marrying, will remain in his parents' house, while the bride goes to live with him in his house which for her is the house of her in-laws. Youth, the new surroundings, and the constant presence of the in-laws have created the image of the newly-wed girl as a synonym for shyness, withdrawal and uncouthness, which is the way Gandhi amusingly chooses to describe himself: "As a new bride with her in-laws." If he had not said it, nobody would have believed it. In all those years Gandhi had within himself the energy, the power, and the greatness that one day would make him into the father of a nation, but this energy was hidden even to himself. Nobody, and least of all himself, could at that time have guessed the giant that was latent in that weak child, in that shy lawyer. If history had not shaken him, if circumstances had not uncovered the genius, Gandhi might have gone on losing court cases and fighting shy of crowds. The history of India would have been different and nobody today would remember Porbandar's little lawyer.

Psychologists teach us we have far greater capacity in thought, word and action than we develop in our whole life. We all can do more than we do and reach farther than we reach. An ordinary person does not use even half his faculties, and whoever uses a little more is a genius. We are ignorant of the art of getting the best out of ourselves, of putting ourselves totally into the fray, of living life to the full. We live stunted routine lives. We use up only a small fraction of our budget. We get stuck at Euclid's 12th theorem or in our first court case, and we never get beyond that. The examples of geniuses who seemed predestined from their cradle to achieve greatness do not help us either. They were different from the start, and it is only left for us to admire them from far. On the other

hand, we have in Gandhi a close relative, a family friend. He didn't play the violin at two and did not recite the Odyssey by heart at five. He grew up for many years in a reassuring mediocrity. His own development shows us the way and the secret of personal growth. There is no question of becoming *mahatmas,* but just of putting to work all our resources, of reaching out as far as we can reach, of living our life to the full. In a word, of waking up.

Let us see how Gandhi eventually woke up.

03. LIFE WITH HONOUR

Gandhi calls the following episode "the event that changed my whole life". After his failure as a lawyer in Bombay (now Mumbai), Gandhi went back to his natal place, Porbandar, to look for some work to earn a livelihood. There he found that his brother had a problem. The British Administrator of the region was prejudiced against him, while he in fact urgently needed the Administrator's help in some legal tangles. It so happened that while in England, Gandhi had come to know and had even entered into some friendship with that Englishman who now was the Administrator in Porbandar. His brother proposed to him to make the best of that friendship, to go to visit him and to remove the bad impression he had about him. Gandhi did not like the idea, but his brother insisted, and he finally went. This was his experience in his own words:

I could not say no to my brother. Against my will I went to see the British Administrator. I was fully conscious that I had no right to ask him for a favour, and that in doing so I was losing my own dignity. But I went. I asked him for an appointment, and he gave it to me. I went to his house and I reminded him of our friendship in London. Quite soon I realised the difference between London and Porbandar, between the British friend on leave in his own country and the Empire's Administrator in his colonial throne. He acknowledged our friendship, and at the same time his face and his tone hardened. I read his thoughts in his eyes: 'You have not come now here to profit from our friendship, have you?' That was what his whole face was telling me clearly. In spite of that, I brought out the topic. The good man grew impatient. 'Your brother is a schemer. I don't want to hear anything about him. I have no time. If your brother has anything to say, let him put in a written application like anyone else.' The answer was quite clear and definitive, and I should have been satisfied with it. But the beggar does not think. I was blinded and went on insisting with my petition. The Administrator got up and told me: 'Now, please, get out of here.' I remonstrated: 'You must listen to me till the end.' He was highly annoyed,

called his assistant and ordered him in Hindi: 'Take this man out immediately.' The servant came in running, said, 'Yes, sir', and got hold of me with both his hands. I went on talking and struggling, but he was stronger than me, he pushed me to the door and threw me to the street. I was left there defeated, ashamed, humiliated.

Gandhi came out of that meeting so furious that he wanted to take the British Administrator to court for the way he had dealt with him. Everybody told him it was madness to try such a thing, but he was stubborn. He went so far as to ask an important political figure, Sir Firozsha Mehta, who sent him the following advice:

Tell Gandhi he is a raw man. He doesn't know the power of the British Empire nor the insolence of its administrators. If he wants to live in peace and earn a living let him shut up and forget the incident.

That advice [continues Gandhi] tasted like bitter poison to me, but I had to swallow it. I never forgot the insult, but I drew a good conclusion from it. I decided with myself that I would never again place myself in such circumstances, and I would never plead for anyone. That was a firm resolution I have never broken. That humiliation changed my life.

Self-respect, a sense of his own dignity, and simply common sense had shaken Gandhi to the root. He had learned by experience the result of lowering himself before others, had felt the vacuity of intrigue, flattery, recommendation. He had betrayed his honour. That personal experience was the starting point for the whole movement that would lead India to price honour above all and to win independence. That had been Gandhi's first direct encounter with British power; and that was also the beginning of the thought and feeling that would one day take him to his victory over that power. Gandhi wrote:

Of course I did wrongly in pleading before the Administrator as I did. But he also did wrongly in dealing with me as he did. His indignation, his anger and his insolence bore no proportion to my fault. He had no right in having me pushed out of his office. No civilised person does that. But apparently an Englishman could do that in India. They were drunk with power.

Gandhi had a great respect for Englishmen and kept it for life. Even when fighting against them, he did it with delicacy and courtesy, with fair play and genuine appreciation. But his appreciation for the English people did not prevent him from seeing the injustice, the pride, the insolence of colonialism under which his country was suffering. A self-respecting person could not live like that. That situation had to be brought to an end. But not by force, by intrigue, by pressure. Gandhi had learned that lesson by his own experience. The answer to the question had still to be found, but the question had already been asked. The definitive problem had been formulated in Gandhi's mind. How to live with honour. For the person and for the country. That enterprise would now fill Gandhi's mind and India's history.

Meanwhile a welcome opportunity presented itself. A friend of Gandhi's family who had business in South Africa needed a lawyer, and it was proposed to send Gandhi there. He didn't leave it on record what his feelings were when going as a lawyer to South Africa, but we can surmise they were similar to the ones he had when he went as a student to England: after failing at home it was good to go out with the hope to succeed abroad. In fact, Gandhi became a good lawyer in South Africa and he ran a reputed office there. But he became something more important too, and this is the story that concerns us here.

In South Africa the colour bar, class distinction, race identity and apartheid were then in full swing. The white on one side, and on the other the Indians, the Chinese, the half-caste, the black. In buses and cinemas, in hotels and trains, in benches and halls. The artificial, unfair, absurd segregation. The absurdity of this situation was that it was tolerated, accepted, taken for granted not only by the upper classes but by the lower ones themselves. It was just considered as normal. Coloured people submitted without complaining to the countless humiliations they faced daily, and-what is equally incredible-whites submitted non-whites to constant indignities without any qualms of conscience. The situation was unbearable, and yet it was accepted. Gandhi landed in the midst of that situation, and his sensitivity, already sharpened by

his experiences in India, was soon going to be put to the test. The occasion was a journey by train.

Gandhi, a well-known lawyer by then, boarded in Durban the train going to Pretoria. He had a first-class ticket and he sat in a first-class compartment in which he was the only passenger. At nine o'clock at night the train arrived at Pietermaritzburg station, and there a white man entered the same first class compartment. When he saw Gandhi, he called the ticket collector and asked him to throw him out. The ticket collector requested Gandhi to go to third class. Gandhi showed his first class ticket and refused to move. The ticket collector called an armed police and he expelled Gandhi by force. Gandhi refused to go to another car, and the train left. He was left with his luggage on the platform, and there he spent the whole night. These were his thoughts on that long and cold night as he remembered them years later:

Either to fight or to quit. This was the dilemma that I set before myself. To reach Pretoria anyway, finish up the business I had in hand and go back to India putting up with whatever I had to put up with; or to face the situation and fight. After all, what I had suffered was very little. In itself it was not important, but it was a symptom of the colour hatred that threatened civilisation. I told myself: If you have the energy and the strength, u se them to put an end to this unfair racial discrimination against coloured people. Suffer whatever you have to suffer in the process, but do not stop till you reach the end.

Here was the seed of non-violence, of passive resistance, of civil disobedience, of the fight for dignity, of the independence of India. Fighting for one's rights, opposing injustice, suffering whatever had to be suffered, putting to work all one's power and energy, bringing racial discrimination to an end. Everything was already there. To embrace justice, to face opposition, to hold on fast, to win. And to begin with, to develop in oneself and in society the moral strength necessary to resist without violence, to fight without hatred, to win without a vengeance. Gandhi was then 24 years old. When many years later an American missionary will ask Gandhi, "Which was the most revolutionary experience in

your whole life?", he will answer immediately: "The night I spent on the platform of the Pietermaritzburg railway station."

I include here a personal experience I don't consider unworthy of this context. Some y ears back in my life, I once spent two months in South Africa where the Indian communities in several main cities had invited me to give talks to them in their original Gujarati language, and I lived in their homes and shared their lives as immigrants in that beautiful country. Those were still the days of Apartheid, and I felt its sting in small and telling incidents. I couldn't have a haircut, as I certainly could go to a haircutting saloon for whites but my Indian friends were not allowed inside with me and I resented that, and could not go to a haircutting saloon for blacks as they wouldn't welcome my presence. I had to wait with my friends at a bus stop watching three buses go by with plenty of empty seats though they were going to our destination, but they were only for whites, and we had to take the fourth bus, late and crowded as it was but meant for coloured people. And, worst of all, I had to commute every day along the 30 kilometres from Lenasia to Johannesburg as the "Asians" with whom I stayed were allowed to have their shops in the city but were not allowed to live there, and go we shifted every morning and evening to and fro along the tired road that witnessed and suffered the daily exodus and return to and from the white city to the coloured neighbor-hoods. All those were new and painful experiences for me.

My tour took me to Durban on the east coast of Natal province, where the name of Natal recalls its discovery on Christmas day by Vasco da Gama who gave it its name in memory of Christ's Nativity. My friends, who had organised my whole trip in detail, proposed to me a programme of talks, meetings, sightseeing and excursions to nearby sites for my days among them. On examining the programme I noticed they had left out something, and I told them: "I know that Pietermaritzburg is not far from here, and I would like to visit the place..., or at least its railway station for a reason I am sure you'll guess." They did guess. The memory of Gandhi. They told me, pleasantly surprised at my **request:** "You are the first person coming from India who asks to be taken to

Pietermaritzburg. We'll be delighted to take you there." I felt flattered by their compliment, and we all went there one day.

Some surprises were awaiting me in Pietermaritzburg, first pleasant and then not so very pleasant. The pleasant part was that the railway station was exactly as it was in Gandhi's time; it had been carefully kept, not precisely out of deference for Gandhi as there was no remembrance of him anywhere and his memory had been lost, but as a typical model of colonial architecture of the time. The curved platform, the thin columns richly ornamented, the ticket windows with broad wrought-metal frames, everything spotless clean, well-shaped, proportioned, pleasant to the sight. I checked that there was no waiting room. This fitted with the fact that Gandhi had spent the cold night in the open on the platform. I then started slowly walking up and down along the whole platform, without a word, just thinking, reflecting, remembering quietly and fervently the slender figure in the lonely night. The station was almost empty. There was no train at that time, and nobody was sitting on the benches in sight. Several of those benches bore the lettering "Reserved for First Class". I had been told that "First Class" meant even now "Whites". Precisely at that moment three black people entered the station and sat on the first bench they saw. It was one marked "First Class". I smiled spontaneously, but my smile did not last long on my lips. The blacks had hardly sat down when a white official came out and told them something in a rather rough way. The three blacks looked at one another with a sad smile. The officer insisted in a louder tone. The station was empty, there was nobody on the benches and nobody about to sit on them, the blacks were not doing any harm to anybody. But they were blacks. They looked at the label "First Class", they looked at the official, they looked at me, helpless witness of the unseemly episode, as though appealing to the obvious and natural common sense of the whole world before such an absurd situation. Then they got up slowly, they went to another bench without a label and they sat on it. The officer went back to his place. I was left standing, confused, unbelieving, doubting for a moment whether the scene had been real and was not a play to recall the past for my benefit. But it was quite real. More than eighty years had passed since the night Gandhi had spent on

that place, but the situation was still the same. Gandhi's message is permanently actual.

04. THE POWER OF TRUTH

Gandhi called it later "holding on to truth" *(satyagraha)*. The knowledge that one is right, that truth is on one's side even if the law is not, and the courage to say it, to stress it, to repeat it, to act accordingly and openly without doubt and without fear, being ready to suffer whatever one has to suffer for it without active resistance, without hardness, without violence, with absolute faith that truth will eventually prevail through time and obstacles. That is *satyagraha*. It was the decisive weapon that took shape in Gandhi's mind under the hard experience of his beginnings in Africa, and that he would later use with full efficiency in larger causes throughout his life.

In another occasion, again while travelling in South Africa, this time in a stagecoach, he met with the same opposition for the same reason: the colour bar. They wanted to throw him down from the coach because of his colour, but he gripped the front bar of the carriage for all he was worth and there he remained unmoved. He was hit with fists and sticks, but he held fast and did not yield an inch. He remained "holding on to truth", depicting in a telling image what he later would express in his favourite word, *satyagraha*, and living out first what he later would preach. Grasping the iron bar, holding on to truth, sure in his conscience that he was right, steady in his determination never to yield, and always ready to suffer what he would have to suffer, never letting go of his hold on truth. He was growing in his own understanding of his own principle by practicing it and discovering it action by action. While he realised the efficiency of the new weapon he had conceived, he began also to grow in self-confidence, to forget his shyness and strengthen his stand. He had a cause for which to fight: justice; and a technique with which to do it: non-violence. This gave him strength and purpose, and transformed his character bringing out the qualities he always had but which had remained dormant in the past. Soon he displayed and developed the outstanding personality that made him into one of the great leaders in history.

Following the same journey he had so tragically interrupted at Pietermaritzburg, as he arrived in Pretoria where he was going, he called a meeting of all Indians in the city and publicly addressed them. This is his comment:

It was the first speech of my life. I had prepared it carefully. I took truth as a theme. I insisted that by coming abroad, the responsibility of Indian merchants was greater than if they had remained in our country. Above all, I claimed that we had to forget all divisions between Hindus, Muslims, Parsis, or Christians, as well as those between people coming from Gujarat, Madras, Punjab, Sind, Kutch or Surat. Finally I suggested that an organisation was started in order to represent before the South African government the sufferings of Indians in the country and find remedies. My speech came out well, and I could see it had made a good impression. That increased my self-confidence.

The shy lawyer who a short time before had not been able to open his mouth in the Bombay High Court, suddenly finds himself making a successful speech before a whole crowd. And his speech goes well. He now had an ideal, he had a weapon, he had a mission to accomplish, and that gave him faith and strength and enthusiasm. He finally could speak, and speak well. What the money of his Bombay client could not achieve, was made easy by the sufferings of his fellow countrymen in South Africa: giving a good speech. The nobility of the cause gave him strength. The injustice of the situation woke him up. The needs of his people led him to fight. There is nothing like a life ideal to get the best out of anyone. Gandhi discovered himself, grew, matured, and by selflessly working heart and soul for others he became the "great soul" *(mahatma)* the world venerates today.

Throughout his life Gandhi kept repeating the maxim: "The end does not justify the means". The end is independence, and that is just; but violence is not just, and consequently he will never use it nor permit it to be used. If he wanted he could have raised a whole army with a word, but he never did it. On the contrary, he always resisted and opposed those who wanted to use violent means. He also taught that non-violence was not the weapon of the weak but

of the strong. Throwing a bomb and hiding one's hand is no courageous deed. Violence is the weapon of the weak-minded, of those who have no faith in their own cause and so have recourse to violence to impose it, of those who do not trust truth and for that very reason they proclaim themselves judges and executors on their own. It is non-violence that requires true courage and faith and conviction. To put up with, to hold on, to wait, to suffer. This takes both physical and moral strength, firmness in mind and in body to an extent that is not easily found. To answer a blow with a blow is pure animal instinct. It is offering the other cheek that is the moral action. Even more, to offer it again and again, and not only on the part of one person but of a group and a people and a whole country. That is a miracle of moral strength. And that was what Gandhi achieved.

The basis of non-violence is faith in humankind. This is its importance and its difficulty. We have to trust each other, which is the hardest and the noblest thing we can do in society. It is hard, because we know the weakness of our race, and it is noble, because when trusting fellow men we appeal to their best feelings, we reach the depths of their soul, we give them the chance and we prepare them to respond to us with the same nobility with which we have approached them. Whoever attacks his neighbours is mistrusting them, and in that mistrust he hastens to get by violence what he cannot get by right. Whoever stakes his claim peacefully, steadily, firmly, is thus proclaiming his faith in his own cause and in the universal opinion as well as in the very conscience of the person against whom he stands. Gandhi knew the British people well, and he knew that in spite of their colonial and even racist attitude, they had a genuine sense of nobility, of justice, of fair play. He knew the British authorities would defend the existing laws, but he also knew that if those laws were not fair the British people themselves would recognise it and act accordingly. That was the long and painstaking task Gandhi undertook. There was no question of attacking an adversary but of educating a friend, no question of frightening anybody but of making themselves understood, no question of winning a battle but of letting truth win. Gandhi always kept a good relationship with the British even in the sharpest moments of his fight with

them. British judges, even when they sent him to jail according to their law, stood up in respect to him when he entered the court. And after independence, India remained in the British Commonwealth with the only change of suppressing the word "British" and thus managing to keep it as "Common-wealth". That was Nehru's touch in the delicate negotiations. Mutual respect always helps both parties.

Gandhi's methods are today known, accepted, imitated. Today's authorities know how to react to a silent manifestation, a peaceful protest, a hunger strike. World leaders in our times like Martin Luther King travelled to India to learn the art of non-violence in Gandhi's land. Today there is an unwritten law for those who stage a peaceful protest and for those who deal with them; the practice is known and the rules are followed. But in Gandhi's time this way of protesting was new and unknown, and both those who staged the protest and those who opposed it were often at a loss how to behave properly. Would the method work? How long would they have to wait? Can a judge send to jail a person who does break the law but does it in full respect, discipline, delicacy? Is he a villain or a hero? Guilty or innocent? The judge who condemns him appears in the eyes of the world guiltier than the accused he condemns. Who is the winner and who is the loser? These questions had no clear answers in the first skirmishes of the campaign of non-violence.

The first "victim" of Gandhi's peaceful methods was a great political and military figure of South Africa in that period, General Smuts. He was responsible for peace and order in the region when Gandhi organised his first peaceful campaign against the unfair tribute Indians had to pay and the identity card and work permit they had always to carry with them, a thing that was not required *of* the white. The good General did not know what to do. He tried force and he tried diplomacy, but he soon realised that those weapons were ineffective against such tactics. And yet, he had to do something. He pondered, he hesitated, he was furious, he calmed down, he gave orders against Gandhi and he cancelled them. He even pledged his word but was not able to keep it. He apologised. He *came* to know Gandhi little by little and

finally he trusted him. Years later, when Gandhi was already a world figure 0.nd some of his admirers prepared a volume of essays on him, one of the contributors was General Smuts himself in his essay he wrote:

For me Gandhi was a problem, and his behaviour was a mystery. His fighting method was entirely new for me. He kept peaceful, he trusted me, he even helped government and cooperated with us. And then he went and opposed the laws he considered unjust. I didn't know what to do with him. I felt angry, frustrated, helpless. He disobeyed the law and got thousands of people to disobey it. But he did all that with utmost discipline, without any violence, with full respect and delicacy. What was I to do? A law had been broken, and I in consequence had to take measures. But I couldn't send two thousand people to jail. My duty was to prevent them from violating the law, but how could I fire against a crowd of peaceful people who faced me with smiles on their lips? At last I had to send Gandhi to jail. But that was precisely what he wanted. That was his victory and his success. What had I got by putting him in jail? Just to make a fool of myself. And that was how, in spite of my having the whole support of the police and the army, and in spite of the enormous pressure the whites put on me, not only had I to get him out of jail but I had to withdraw the laws he opposed.

This was the first victory of non-violence. The first triumph of passive disobedience. The first demonstration before the world that violence was not the only method to obtain results (actually violence never resolves problems but makes them worse), that the non-violent alternative is the one that solves them at the end and leaves no traces of hatred and no bitterness of defeat. During that first stay of his in jail, Gandhi weaved with his hands a pair of straw sandals and presented them to General Smuts. He accepted them and kept them as a relic.

Famous as he already was now after his first victory in South Africa, Gandhi was invited by Indian leaders to come and study the political situation in his own country. He arrived in India to public acclaim, took part in the Indian Congress meetings and proposed a resolution to condemn the fact that Indians were not

properly treated in Africa. The Congress president, Dadabhai Navroji, told him sadly and feelingly: "How do you complain that Indians are not justly treated in Africa when Indians are not justly treated in India? Come to work here with us. This is your true field for work."

That was how Gandhi found himself finally in India and faced the huge task of applying his non-violent methods to the larger problem of his country's independence. It was no easy task. He had to face Nehru's energy, Sardar Patel's aggressiveness, Subhash Chandra Bose's militarism. All wanted quick, effective, military solutions. So Gandhi had to educate the leaders before educating the people. His own patience was the first example. The only person Gandhi called his guru (and that only in political matters, as he never acknowledged anyone as his religious or intellectual guru), Gopal Krishna Gokhale, advised him to spend a whole year studying personally the situation in India before taking any steps. Gandhi accepted the advice, and he travelled through the subcontinent for a year gathering information and forming his opinion. He arrived at the conclusion that the people wanted freedom, they were ready for any sacrifice for its sake, they preferred peaceful methods but nobody had any idea how this could be done. That was precisely what Gandhi was going to tell them.

How did Gandhi achieve all this is precisely the theme of this book, and I'll explain it step by step. For the moment I'll end this chapter with an image that sums up and brings out in itself the doctrine of non-violence, Gandhi's vision and effectiveness, and the place he occupied in the great enterprise of India's awakening.

I take the scene from the so called "Salt March", one of the most genial chapters of Gandhi's life. The fight for independence was on, but Gandhi's methods were still doubted. He was asked to show how his peaceful methods could indeed be effective. He himself understood the moment had come to test and to prove his approach in a way that would carry conviction both in India and in London. And then he thought of the extraordinary idea that by itself was enough to prove his genius in an evident way. That was the "Salt March" or

"Dandi March" as history has called it from the place where it was enacted. The British kept the monopoly of salt production in India, and it was a penal offense for any private person to collect even a handful of the salt that gathered on the low and hot coast-line of the Indian shores. On the other hand, salt was universally needed as a condiment for food, was part of human sweat in hot latitudes, and was traditionally taken as an honoured symbol of hospitality and loyalty (you cannot fall foul of the man "whose salt you have eaten"), all of which was incompatible with having that very salt controlled and monopolised by a foreign invader. Gandhi explained all this to the British Viceroy in a respectful letter, and let him know that on such a date and such an hour he would initiate a march from his headquarters in Ahmedabad with a group of volunteers, and would cover on foot in several days the distance till Dandi on the coast where he would collect with his own hand a handful of salt, fully aware that in doing that he was breaking an existing law. The letter was made public, and the whole world kept watch. The communication media rushed to the event, pictures and films were taken of the beginning and the process of the march, the number of news correspondents joining the crowd increased day by day, international tension mounted as the frail figure of the Mahatma walked tirelessly towards the sea. He reached Dandi. He bent low on the shore and gathered a handful of salt in his hands. Immediately the whole machinery of the British Empire was set in motion. Gandhi and all the Indian leaders that could organise the crowds into a national movement were sent to jail, a military guard surrounded all salt works to prevent access, and a state of emergency was declared in the whole country. But Gandhi had foreseen everything. He had anticipated that all political leaders would be put in jail, and so he had beforehand put a woman, the poetess Sarojini Naidu, in charge of the whole action and its consequences. She approached the police lines in the Dharasana salt works with a handful of volunteers who, dressed all in white and without any weapon, began to advance slowly towards the gates guarded by the police. As they came close, the police brought them down with blows from their *lathis* or iron-tipped canes. The volunteers fell one by one, and the nurses at the ready lifted them and took them to the emergency hospital they

had set up on the spot. One batch of volunteers succeeded another, and the police continued in cold blood with their brutal repression. It was then that a scene took place which an American newsman witnessed on the spot and soon went round the world in the radio and the papers of the time:

A British sergeant was carrying out his orders with as much cruelty as zeal. He would hit over the head with his *lathi* every volunteer that came in front of him till the man fell down unconscious at his feet, and went on to the next when one fell down. Then a strong and hefty Sikh volunteer approached him in the line. On seeing him, the sergeant grabbed his *lathi* with both his hands, lifted it high, and brought it down with all his might on the head of the helpless victim with added strength to render useless the turban that the man, as all Sikh people do, was wearing round his head. The volunteer collapsed on the ground with blood over his face. The nurses took him, placed ice on his head, he recovered, stood up and went to take his place in the line of volunteers again in front of the same British sergeant. The sergeant had seen everything, tired and covered in perspiration as he stood, and on seeing the same volunteer coming forward again he hardened his face, steadied his legs, and lifted his *lathi* with both hands ready to hit. All those who were watching the scene were horrified, expecting the worst. But then the heart of the sergeant was touched. Little by little he loosened the grip of his hands, he brought down his *lathi* slowly, he smiled a helpless smile and murmured between his teeth: 'Who's going to hit this man? My *lathi* is no use here. Here he is the brave one, not I.' With that the British sergeant stood to attention before the Indian volunteer, clicked his heels, saluted him in the military way putting his right hand to his forehead, placed his *lathi* under his arm, turned round and left.

Those news appeared the next day in every newspaper in every country round the world. The perfect image of the strength and power of non-violence. Brute force can hit. But how far? Before the naked courage of an unarmed volunteer no weapon is of any use. Violent opposition to armed force seems at first sight to be the only answer, but in fact it is not an answer at all. The armed conflict creates a first illusion of power and strength, but in the long run it defeats

itself. When violence meets violence, it increases, the conflict spreads, and the solution becomes more difficult. On the other hand, when violence meets non-violence it finds itself suddenly frustrated, disarmed, ineffective. Its methods and its weapons are of no use now. The sergeant leaves, as the British had eventually to leave India before a non-violent resistance. The Indians got back their salt and their land. There is no weapon more efficient than non-violence when it is handled with conviction, with courage, with perseverance, with faith. This was the lesson of the Dharasana salt works and of the independence of India. The great historical lesson of Gandhi. The world has still to learn that lesson. Back to lesson number four.

05. LEADER OF LEADERS

Gandhi worked at the same time on three different fronts: opposing British rule, educating India for freedom, and, perhaps the hardest and most delicate task, obtaining the cooperation and coordination of all the Indian leaders of the time. It was this last front that put his tact, his wisdom, his patience, his ability as a negotiator and his capacity to lead to the test. On the Indian political horizon shone at the time figures as different, genial, independent, and popular as Tilak and Gokhale, Nehru and Patel, Jhinnah and Kripalani, while thinkers and sociologists like Kishorlal Mashruwala, Swami Anand, Vinoba Bhave and Kakasaheb Kalelkar stood out in their own right. All of them acknowledged Gandhi as their supreme leader, but their strong personalities clashed at times while submitting to him. The great literary figure of the country, Rabindranath Tagore, welcomed him and gave him full support. Thus Gandhi soon emerged with almost natural authority and winning simplicity as the leader of all leaders and the father of the country. This enhanced his noble figure in his own country and before the world.

Gandhi possessed to the highest degree the two qualities that make a great leader: an inborn intuition to gauge a person's depth, and an irresistible attraction to make others follow him unconditionally. The best way to realise his magnetic influence on people will be to see real examples of Gandhi's dealing with the greatest figures of his time in the country and how he gathered round himself the brightest galaxy of valuable collaborators who shared his labours and multiplied his influence. I begin with the case, incredible in its simplicity, of his faithful secretary and inseparable companion for life, Mahadev Desai. This is how Kalelkar tells the story:

Mahadev did not know Gandhi personally, but he felt attracted to him and to his programme, and taking advantage of Gandhi's visit to Godhra in Gujarat, he went to see him and offered his services to him. He had started work as a lawyer in Bombay, was out on a brief holiday, and thought he could make himself useful in some way to Gandhi's and India's cause those few days. He

showed him some of his essays, a speech he had written in English and some of his letters. He had a good handwriting and was very careful in all he did. The interview did not last more than ten or fifteen minutes. That was the first time Gandhi was seeing him, and there had been no previous knowledge or recommendation in any way. But Gandhi was an expert jeweller who realised at first sight the value of an authentic diamond. And he just told him: "You may stay as my secretary." Mahadev was taken by surprise, but he too rose to the occasion and accepted on the spot. He asked: "When shall I come to take charge of my work?" Gandhi answered: "Take charge? You've already taken charge. You begin right now." Mahadev weakly remonstrated: "At least let me go home to say goodbye and take a change of clothes with me." Gandhi did not yield: "With me there is no going back. We'll give you clothes here. Sit down and I'll dictate you a letter. This evening we start on our journey.

That was all. A ten minute interview, an offer, a surrender. And a friendship for life. Mahadev never left Gandhi's side till he died of a heart attack in the Agha Khan palace in Poona, which served as his jail and where his tomb now rests. He was Gandhi's right hand and his closest and most helpful companion. Gandhi is said to have wept at his death more than for any other person in his whole life.

Gandhi knew by instinct the value of the communication media, and so his first concern, even in those days, when he settled in any place, was to set up a printing press and to publish a paper. I have seen the rather primitive printing machine that is kept as a relic in the Phoenix Ashram in South Africa and with which Gandhi began his printing campaigns, and I have visited the Navajivan Press in Ahmedabad which even today is one of the best in India. The next episode precisely refers to the establishing of this important editing firm from where English, Hindi and Gujarati publications kept coming out to spread Gandhi's message throughout India and on to the whole world. Gandhi needed a man for the work, and his usual instinct soon led him to pinpoint the ideal person for it: Swami Anand. I knew him at the end of his life, and I could appreciate how fitting Gandhi's election was, as well as how hard it must have

been for Gandhi to win over such an independent and original a character as Swami Anand was. He never followed or obeyed anyone, and always remained the genial personality, the free spirit, the wandering seeker of truth and beauty along the Himalayas, the tireless history scholar, the gifted writer who made printers and editors suffer with his ruthless quest for typographical perfection. Gandhi sought him out and wriggled out of him the bargain to come for six months to Ahmedabad to set up the new editing concern. Here I quote Kalelkar again:

Swami Anand threw himself with such a zeal into his work that he seemed just another cogwheel in the large machinery of the printing press. I am a witness how much he worked and got others to work. His table was always full of papers printed and to be printed, and in the midst of them all there was a glass of milk and a few bananas. With his right hand he corrected proofs, and with his left hand he went on eating bananas. When he finished a set of proofs, he took a sip of milk, and back to work. He would spend three or four days without leaving his place not even to bathe or to go to the toilet. And he just slept a few hours on the floor by his table.

Thus was his work getting on when one day he received a letter of Gandhi who at the time was in North India on his government work. In his letter he wrote: It has been a matter of great satisfaction and relief for me that you have taken charge of the Navajivan Press. I hope everything is going well with you and you find yourself at home there.'

Swami Anand was at a loss to understand what was the meaning of it all. He had not written to Gandhi, had not complained about anything or anybody and could not figure out the purpose of such a letter. Suddenly he realised it: 'That's true! I had promised Gandhi to work for six months in his Press, and today is six months to a day from that date. That old man is sharper than he looks. I had forgotten I had come here for six months only, but he was not going to forget it! See how he is hooking me again. Kripalani is right when he says that this old man has to be carefully watched.'

And so Swami Anand stayed in Navajivan. Gandhi knew how to "hook" people. With love and respect rather than with a document and a signature. Devoted work, true fidelity, total sacrifice. His followers forgot dates, limits, and conditions. Once they went to work for him, they never left him. Many people followed Gandhi in his life more or less closely, but for me, this commitment of Swami Anand to Gandhi's cause is the most exalted tribute to the magical attraction of his exceptional personality. At times it even happened that people who approached him with the idea of measuring him up in order to scale down his stature and so to tell people that Gandhi was not up to much after all, were on the spot taken up by him and had to admit that Gandhi was not less but even much more than they had imagined. Such was the experience of Shankarlal Banker, the social worker who is still alive when I write this, and this is how he told it to me:

Kripalani and I were then in Mumbai, in full political and patriotic activity. We heard that a certain Gandhi, a man who apparently wanted to do some-thing, had come to Mumbai, and we thought of going to see him, just to size him up. We went to his quarters, and there he was squatting on the floor. We sat on chairs to feel on top of the situation. But that did not help. We left the room converted in ardent followers of the Mahatma. Don't ask me what he told us because I don't remember, but there was something in that man that charmed anybody and made them feel happy to work under him. We went to size him up, but it was he that sized us up!

But perhaps the most remarkable case among all of Gandhi's followers is the one of Sardar Patel. "Sardar" means chief, military officer, captain, and that was the surname by which, in respect and appreciation, the "whole of India knew Vallabbhai Patel, the Karamsad lawyer, the **vice**-minister of Pandit Nehru, the architect of India's unity against separatist maharajas, the iron leader, the general-in-chief. Independent, energetic, even arrogant character who later would require all of Gandhi's tact and authority to balance the uneasy relationship between Nehru and Patel. In a speech that Sardar Patel, who was not much given to autobiography for that matter, made years later in the

university Gandhi founded in Ahmedabad, he hinted at the personal struggle that at the end took him to Gandhi's side. Says Patel:

Back from my law studies in England I started earning some money working as a lawyer. I was interested in politics, but there was at the time no outstanding political leader, and those in the field were just talking and talking. To a man of action as I was that meant nothing at all. Each day, when finishing my work, I used to go to the Bombay lawyers club where I spent my time smoking and playing cards. If any time a speaker came to address us, I took pleasure in laughing at him.

One day Gandhi came to our club. I had read something about him in the papers. I listened to him, yes, but with my usual scepticism. I took him as a joke. I not even had the courtesy to put off my cigar, and I went on smoking while he was talking. This is almost an insult in our society, but it exactly reflects my mood at the moment. Even so I came out with the impression that that man was not stopping at words and meant facts. I decided to keep watching.

I never thought about his principles. Violence and nonviolence meant nothing to me. But I saw a man who knew what he wanted and was ready to do it, who loved his country, loved his freedom, and had consecrated to it his life and all he had. I didn't ask for more. Then the problem came up of the tax on the peasants of Kheda district in Gujarat, which is the district in which my native place Karamsad is situated, and Gandhi entrusted the whole affair to me. Since then I surrendered entirely to him and consecrated to him my whole life.

Some call me a blind follower, and reproach me that that is not my character. I am not ashamed of that. When I decided to follow this man I fully realised I had to be prepared because some day people would spit on my face because of his name. And since then till now I have never repented. He shows the way, and I follow him. I have absolute faith in him.

The "iron leader" converted into a "blind follower". The teacher becomes disciple. The "Sardar" comes under orders from the "Mahatma". Gandhi's strength and attractiveness attracted all kinds of persons. And the remarkable

thing is that Gandhi had no external qualities to draw the attention of people. No physical attractiveness, no eloquence, no scholarship, no art. Pure simplicity, clarity, and honesty. The firm ideal to be obtained, and the personal example to lead the way to it. With that alone he gathered round himself a distinguished set of faithful followers, he attracted the most outstanding figures in India, he lead them all to the final victory.

One more example, the one of Kalelkar, Gandhi's intellectual heir, writer and educationist, orthodox Brahmin and convinced ecumenist, whose witness I collected from his own lips in the long days of the friendship that united me to him till his death some years ago. After some initial turns in his life, Kalelkar had settled in Vadodara to head a college of national education established by the great patriot and educationist Keshavrao Deshpande. Gandhi who, in his deep and universal vision, wanted to establish a national university in Ahmedabad, asked Kalelkar to take charge of this project and set up the new university from scratch. Kalelkar accepted, went to Ahmedabad, and began to work with Gandhi. At that time Gandhi had to depart for Champaran in North India, and Kalelkar remained in Ahmedabad. However, he had left some business pending in Vadodara, and there he went just for a couple of days. Someone told Gandhi in North India about it, and Kalelkar received immediately a very hard letter in which Gandhi was telling him dryly: "You cannot serve two masters. Either you remain with me or you go back to Vadodara." Kalelkar was deeply hurt by this letter. He immediately wrote back to Gandhi explaining the situation and renewing his unconditional commitment. Thinking that a purely verbal guarantee was not enough, Kalelkar decided not to leave Gandhi's headquarters at all, and he stayed for a continuous year in Ahmedabad to prove his fidelity with facts. Gandhi recognised his sincerity, and after one year he began taking Kalelkar along with him as a companion in his journeys. In one of those journeys the following telling episode took place.

Gandhi and his entourage were planning the new campaign to propagate the use of Hindi in South India as the national language in India. It was a delicate campaign as South India had its own languages (Tamil, Telugu, Malayalam) and

therefore Hindi, as an imposition from the North, was not popular there. A group of Gandhian workers, Kalelkar among them, where discussing the issue while Gandhi sat in another corner of the room answering his correspondence. They were entrusting the several tasks to several people when one of them asked aloud: "What task shall we give Kalelkar ?" Gandhi was writing letters, but at the same time he was following the discussion at the other corner, and when he heard the question, he interrupted them and said: "To Kalelkar you can entrust anything..., provided it is not easy." And he smiled his characteristic roguish smile his photographs have so well preserved for us.

Kalelkar told me that when he heard those words of Gandhi, his heart melted within him. Gandhi was trusting him. Gandhi knew he had capacity for work and was entirely committed to the cause. Giving him an easy task was insulting him. The teacher shows his appreciation for a clever student by asking him difficult questions in which he can shine, and asking an easy question is showing a low esteem of the student. Gandhi appreciated Kalelkar and he showed it in that spontaneous and practical way. "Ask him whatever you want... provided it is not easy." Kalelkar went on to tell me that at that moment he just surrendered his whole heart and life to Gandhi. "He had trusted me, and I was not going to let him down. I would show that I was worthy of his trust. The harder the work they give me, the better. I'll carry it out with all my strength, and I'll show everybody that Gandhi did well in trusting me."

Gandhi's trust helped Kalelkar grow. That was Gandhi's secret. He first put his followers to the test as he had done with Kalelkar, and then he granted them his full trust. By trusting them he brought them closer to him, made them give of their best, kept them faithful to him. That was how he surrounded himself with capable and devoted collaborators. Leading by trusting was his way.

06. A TEACHER OF A NATION

If Gandhi's first front was that of his collaborators, his second and more universal, extensive, and lasting front was the whole people whom he proposed to train for independence. Gandhi knew that the British would eventually quit, and he also knew that the exit of the British was not the same as independence. For the bird to fly it's not enough to loosen the bonds around its legs, it needs wings and strength and exercise and faith. To give back to India its wings was Gandhi's great task. The long years of servitude had fostered passivity, carelessness, negligence and negativity on the part of the people, and before giving it back its power it had to be given back its dignity. Before the prince sits on the throne, he has to be trained as a king. Gandhi wanted a sovereign people and he dedicated all his strength to its creation. Rabindranath Tagore's words were his inspiration and guide:

We observe certain parasites in nature that live at the expense of other animals, absorb their food directly from them, are carried with them wherever they go; they have no movement or digestion of their own. It looks quite comfortable in a way, but the insect that lives in that way has to pay a very high price for its laziness. The parasite loses all capacity to digest food, its digestive system atrophies for lack of use, and ceases to function. Full rest... and full slavery.

A slave nation, and in that sense a parasite to another nation, loses also its capacity to assimilate its own food: its food for body and soul. In order to give freedom back to that nation it has first to be given back its spiritual metabolism, its power to assimilate, its dignity, its honour.

India's long years as a colony had generated a general and deep laziness in the Indian people. When you are working for someone else you don't work with your heart. When you are working for a foreign government you don't give your best. Who is going to strive to increase the national gains when those gains are going to go to another nation? How to resist the temptation to mix water with the milk when it is not your children but your costumers that are going to drink it?

Working for strangers lowers the worker's enthusiasm and fosters mediocrity. Then comes the danger, following Tagore's thought, that when the milk is going to be drunk by the children at home, in virtue of the acquired bad habit we may put water into their milk too.

The danger in India was that the passivity and negligence generated by British rule would persist after the British left. The people had to be aroused. The nation had to be made to stand on its feet. New standards in enthusiasm, work, commitment, efficiency and responsibility had to be attained. That was Gandhi's aim in his nationwide campaign to make a great people worthy of its freedom under its own government. Soon India would be called the greatest democracy in the world. An example taken from one of his periods in jail:

A fellow prisoner of Gandhi's in jail had been heating water in a pail over some burning coals for Gandhi to take a bath in winter. When the water was hot he took the pail and called Gandhi. Gandhi noticed that in the fire the coals were still burning and he asked his companion:

'Is this fire of any use now?'

'No, Gandhi, it's no use any more.'

'Then put it off so that the coals can be used again.'

'What do we care when those coals don't belong to us but to the government?'

Then Gandhi took the opportunity to go on with his teaching: "There you are mistaken. These coals do not belong to the government but to the country. The British government spends as much money as it wants, but that money comes out of the pockets of India's poor. These coals that are burning are our coals, and it is we that have to save. Now go and put them off so that they can still be used again."

Gandhi was conscious that whatever he did in public or in private was broadcast around in a thousand ways and reached the last corners of the country. Every word, every gesture, every anecdote multiplied from mouth to mouth, was retold and reprinted, and became a teaching, an example, an exhortation for his dear millions. By saving a few half burnt coals he was preaching saving,

responsibility, awareness that public expenditure is actually private, and what belongs to the country belongs to each citizen both in its use and in its conservation.

It was to Charlie Andrews, the Christian clergyman and close friend whom Gandhi honoured with the title of "Dinbandhu" (friend of the poor) that Gandhi told the words that best summed up his programme, his strategy and his faith: "This is my faith: India will become independent the day it purifies itself and gets itself ready. Not a minute before, not a minute after. Independence comes from within." A few years later, Nehru described thus with his graphical and pointed style Gandhi's success in his fundamental task of awaking India: "What Gandhi has done is straightening up our backs. We all walked bent down, submitted, humiliated, and it is quite easy to climb on a bent back as the British did with us. Now we are walking straight and erect again and nobody can climb on our back."

Walking straight again. Erect. Proud. Independence comes from within. That was Gandhi's way. Independence, freedom, social justice are the fruit that will fall by itself when it is ripe, and ripeness comes from the tree that nourishes, not from the hand that plucks the fruit. That is the summary of the whole of the history of India's independence and of the whole of Gandhi's thought. Straighten up, and the rider on your back will fall off.

Violence is not compatible with the dignity of the person. He who attacks, degrades himself. Having recourse to violence means ceasing to have faith in any moral strength in one's own cause, in one's own honour. Gandhi always linked the cause of honour with the giving up of violence. He stressed the way of peace in every circumstance and before all audiences, and he took upon himself the hard task of educating the masses in the practice of resistance without violence. That was a new approach and it took much planning and trying and insisting to get his message across to the whole people. His first public undertaking after his initial period of the study of India's situation was the strike of the textile workers in Ahmedabad. The workers claimed an increase in salary, and on the authorities refusing it, they went on strike.

Gandhi stood for them with some clear conditions: total peace at every moment, no pressure on anyone, holding on to the strike happened what may and as long as it would be needed, and if it came to the point where they had nothing to eat, to work then in any other job just to avoid going hungry. Gandhi himself describes for us the whole situation:

Every day under a tree near the river we had our meeting. Hundreds of strikers gathered, and I reminded them of the promise they had made: total peace and respect to themselves above everything. They prepared posters with slogans saying, 'Dignity is truth', and they went every day in peaceful procession through the city's streets singing patriotic hymns.

The strike lasted twenty-one days. The first two weeks went very well. The strikers kept an admirable discipline, they went round in strength and in peace, and they came in their crowds to the prayer near the river. I reminded them of their promise, and they chanted: 'We'll do or we'll die!' *(karenge ya marenge)*. That was truly worth seeing.

But at the end some started to yield and wanted to go back to work, opinions were divided, the two groups clashed and each group began to exert pressure on the other. At the beginning it was only with words, but I was afraid they would soon pass on to physical violence. Each day those who came to the prayer meetings by the river were fewer, and those who came did so without any enthusiasm or even interest. There was no singing and no chanting of slogans. I saw very clearly that they were doubting and their moral strength was vanishing. For me that was a moment of personal crisis. What was I to do ? I was the one who directed them, who had led them to bind themselves with a promise, who had been witness to their oath. I had to go on helping them to keep their promise, and I had to do it without any violence on my part. How to do it ?

We were in the middle of our morning meeting. I didn't know what to do and had not prepared what to say. But as I began to speak I heard myself saying: 'If you do not remain firm in keeping up your peaceful strike till we reach an

acceptable solution, I will fast and will take no food until we get such a solution.'

That was the first of Gandhi's famous fasts in India. The tree near the side of the Sabarmati River under which Gandhi sat when proclaiming his fast is still there, and I have stood by its reliving in my heart with reverence and wonder that pregnant moment of world history. Gandhi insisted that his fast was not meant to make the mill- owners yield but to get the workers to stand firm in their promise. And the workers understood him at once. They got back their courage and their enthusiasm, they reaffirmed their promise and stood on their dignity. "Dignity is truth." The opposition yielded to the truth, both sides accepted an independent arbitration, and the strike came to an end. The mill-owners distributed sweets to the workers in their factories. Dignity had won.

The great obstacle on the way to foster and strengthen national dignity was the inferiority complex the presence and domination of the British had created in the Indian people. Political power in the hands of the British had meant cultural superiority and racial pride on their part. The British ruled over the country, and that meant that in their culture, their religion, their way of life, their education, their language, their literature, their way of dressing and behaving, in everything they were superior people, and this had to be admitted with all its consequences. The complex of a colony. The tyranny of culture. Slavery of thought, which is far more dangerous and hurtful than slavery of money or of political power. This humiliating complex had wrought havoc in the Indian mentality. The higher classes prided themselves on their command of English with an Oxford accent, on wearing a tie, absurd as it is everywhere and particularly in India's heat, on receiving honours and titles as Sir or Baronet from the queen of England. Everything foreign was excellent, that is everything coming from England, to the detriment of Indian goods and Indian customs. Cultural colonisation.

In truth such an inferiority complex had no real basis on facts. India had and has a cultural, literary, mystic, artistic, folkloric richness of the highest rank as the whole world now recognises, but what is now seen and recognised by all

everywhere, was not seen and recognised in India itself at the time. The conscience of one's culture, the pride in one's traditions, the faith in one's own identity had to be restored. The national image of the Indian character had to be established. That was the delicate and transcendental task which Gandhi undertook with his characteristic insistence and tact. To awaken the interest in Indian languages, to foster the use of Indian products, to follow Indian style in buildings and Indian art in decoration, to speak as Indians and dress as Indians. That was the open and popular programme Gandhi launched with his word and his example.

A telling gesture was the one of dress as it was daily visible and strikingly typical. Judging people by what they are wearing is universal prejudice. The "beautiful people" dress beautifully, and in India the beautiful people dressed in full English fashion, as that was taken to be the elegant, the up-to-date, the proper thing to do. Coat and pants meant distinction while the *dhoti,* that is the white rectangular piece of cloth tied round the waist and hanging perpendicularly to the feet, was considered vulgar, and proper only for villagers. It was said of Nehru's father, in his refined and exclusive taste, that he sent his shirts to be ironed in Paris. To dress in European style was considered a sign of nobility, and that was a subtle way of declaring that Europeans were superior people. Sartorial domination in style and dress. Inferiority complex was apparent and enacted each day in the dresses all wore and saw others wear. The tyranny of fashion had to be abolished as it went against true patriotism, and Indian dress had to be given again its nobility and its pride of place.

Gandhi had experience in this matter. During his stay in England as a student he had not only dressed as an Englishman but he had gone to extremes in fashion and elegance. He himself tells his own excesses with self- deprecating humour in a chapter in his autobiography with the good-humoured title, "When I became civilised".

My efforts to become 'civilised' were as superficial as they were expensive - much more expensive than I could afford. I had brought to London English style

suits of clothes, but they had been made in Bombay. Their cut could not match the elegance I saw in London, and so I had new suits made at the 'Army and Navy' tailors. I spent 19 shillings (which was a fortune at the time) on a top hat, or as they called it there a 'chimney hat'. Not satisfied with that, I went to Bond Street where the most elegant people in the world have their dresses made, and I had a dinner jacket made for 20 pounds. Twenty pounds ... just burned down like that. My elder brother in India, as kind as he was generous, bore my expenses, and on top of that I asked him to send me a gold chain with a large pendant to wear it openly on my vest. And he sent it in his innocence. Then there was the problem of the tie. They sold ties already properly tied, but that showed up and was not proper, so I had to learn the art of tying my ties. I who when in India would not see a mirror except when I shaved from time to time, spent a good while every day in London before a large mirror tying my tie and parting my hair. This craze of dressing in the latest fashion lasted for several years with me.

In another place in his autobiography he mentions how his desire to appear European took him even to try to learn dancing and playing the violin. Those lessons did not take him far, and they only left him with the empty memory of a useless effort. When going from South Africa to India he would be dressed again in his typical Kathiawadi dress: tight narrow pants and long shirt outside them with a large turban, all in white, as a sharp contrast with the Indian leaders who went to receive him in Bombay all dressed in coats and ties. Later on, as he came into close contact with the crowds of people with their scanty dresses, he went on discarding first his turban and then his shirt, till he remained dressed in his *dhoti* from his waist down and an undershirt round his shoulders in the typical image he has left us in all his photographs. Churchill referred to him disparagingly as "the half-naked fakir", thus missing the message of solidarity with the poor in Gandhi's simplicity.

The Indian viceroy invited Gandhi to visit him in his royal palace in New Delhi, majestic showpiece of colonial architecture with its wide gardens, unending stairways, decorated halls. Gandhi presented himself clad in his usual attire as

a graphical contrast to all the luxury around him. He was not rebuking the viceroy, he was just representing his people, and so he dressed like them. Later on, when he went to England as the head of the Indian delegation to the Round Table Conference, the King himself, George V, invited him to take tea with him in the Buckingham Palace. Gandhi's companion in that visit described the situation:

"The English chief of protocol respectfully informed Gandhi that for the royal audience he had to dress up according to palace etiquette. His *dhoti* let his legs naked and that could be offensive to the eyes of the king and even more of the queen. It was not a dignified dress to wear. Gandhi answered with the same respect that if he was going to see the king it was left to him to decide which dress was dignified. He was told: 'The King's invitation is an order. If His Majesty invites you to come to Palace, you have to come to Palace, and if you come to Palace you have to be dressed according to Palace protocol.' Gandhi stood his ground: 'I sincerely appreciate the honour the King does to me by inviting me, but I'm not ready to change my dress in order to see him.' Before that attitude the British authorities had to yield, and Gandhi entered Buckingham Palace in his usual dress.

After his audience, the press was waiting for him. A British newspaper correspondent, sorry to think that a man dressed in a bed-sheet had taken tea with the king and queen of England, could not restrain himself and asked him: 'Mr. Gandhi, didn't you feel awkward or ashamed to sit for tea with the king and queen in that dress ?' Gandhi laughed light-heartedly and answered: 'Nothing awkward. Each of us was quite comfortable with what he was wearing. And, speaking of clothes, the king had so many clothes on that they could have been enough for the two of us.'

There was something more than good humour in Gandhi's answer. There was the sense of his own responsibility and of the dignity of his people. The equality of all men and the respect for each individual. The king of England in his bright uniform and Gandhi clad in half a sheet sit at the same table to take tea together. They are both equal. Indians and Englishmen are equal. The anecdote

reaches everywhere, the image is printed in papers round the world, and its message, its invitation, its urgency go with it. When a simple Indian labourer dressed in his *dhoti* while toiling in the fields comes to hear that Gandhi, dressed also in a *dhoti,* has sat as an equal with the king of England, he learns to respect and appreciate his own *dhoti,* and, with it, to appreciate himself, his work, his country. A whole lecture in self-respect as only Gandhi could give. Simple and efficacious antidote against the national inferiority complex. Patriotism and humanism. Equality and dignity. Gandhi as a master of communication. And Gandhi as an expert psychologist in the knowledge of people and of the way to reach them. As he himself changed, he went showing to others the way of change, and as he himself woke up, he made all wake up with him. Nehru himself, who was an Indian to the core but had been educated in England in a fully English way, had to react consciously and to undertake a spiritual return journey to his own country and culture in order to feel Indian again, to find his roots, and so he called his best book, which was his intellectual autobiography, *The Discovery of India.* Nehru, an Indian, had to discover India. Gandhi had to discover India. The whole nation had to discover itself, and that was Gandhi's lifework. To educate, to wake up, to discover. Gandhi was the inspired master of a whole nation, and indeed of the whole world.

07. A HIMALAYAN BLUNDER

The first lesson the master imparted was the one of respect and dignity for one's own self, and the two great consequences of this lesson were and continue to be nonviolence and national unity. A nation that respects itself, that remains united, that wants to be free as a consequence and states his claim to independence with firmness, with unanimity and without violence, cannot but be heard. Freedom comes as a result of non-violence and unity based on self-respect. He who respects himself does not stoop to violence, and learns to respect others, to recognise the same rights for others, the dignity of each one and the unity of all as equal members of a large family. Equality, dignity, and non-violence are only three aspects of one and the same fundamental idea.

The Rowlatt Act was the first occasion to put nonviolence into practice at a national level. Gandhi had suppressed all opposition to the British government during the First World War out of the feeling, as noble as it is uncommon, that he would not take advantage of his opponent's weakness. "So long as England is at war it is not fair that we attack it from the back with our movement for independence. Let us wait for its conflict to be solved, and then we shall present our own." The other leaders were impatient and they found it difficult to accept so much generosity with the enemy. Some even preferred to take advantage of the difficult situation of the British to push independence with a vantage. But Gandhi's proposal won, and the nation waited. There was even the hope that England would appreciate the nobility of the Indian attitude, and as a recompense, after the war it would accelerate the process of independence of its colony. But the hope proved false. The Crown did not respond to Gandhi's noble gesture. The war got over, and the British government did not lose time to enact a new law, the Rowlatt Act, which in Gandhi's measured and studied opinion "no people with self-respect and no person with honour could accept". Gandhi got ready for action, and this is what he wrote to the South Indian

leader, Shri Rajagopalachari, who would later become free India's first Governor General:

The idea occurred to me in my sleep, and I validated it as I woke up. As an answer to such an unjust law, I propose that the whole country observes a total strike. Peacefully, of course, and with absolute moderation. This is a holy war that requires total purity in all of us. As a symbol of this purity and a means to obtain it, I propose that the first day we should all fast and spend the whole day without eating and without going to work.

The whole country obeyed Gandhi and went on strike with an exemplary spirit. Gandhi himself declared: "It was a grandiose and touching spectacle." But it was not possible to keep up such purity of spirit through such huge crowds everywhere. There were a few isolated incidents and violent clashes. Shops were looted, cables cut, trains derailed. The chief of police, Commissary Griffiths, laughed at Gandhi: "Your intentions may be good, but your people do not understand and will never understand you. They understand disobedience, but not peaceful disobedience. They are ready to strike work: anybody can do that with pleasure. The hard thing is to do it with order and discipline, and your people are not doing that. You have no control of your people, and if you cannot control your people you have no right to excite them."

Gandhi reflected. He studied the reports that reached him from the whole of India. He recognised that in some places the crowds had overreacted. Not all had yet assimilated the doctrine of non-violence. And Gandhi, with absolute sincerity and rare courage, drew the consequences:

It was then that I used the expression that became famous: 'A Himalayan blunder.' I had been mistaken. I had been in a hurry. The people were not prepared for peaceful disobedience, and in sending them on such a mission throughout the whole country I had been painfully mistaken. An error as large as a mountain. Such was my Himalayan blunder.

Many people laughed at me when I retracted; but I have never repented of having recognised my mistake. Some of my friends and collaborators were angry with me. They said that if we had to wait for all to become saints and to

behave with full meekness, we would have to give up our independence movement at a national level. But I stuck to my position. If the leaders of the people cannot control themselves and control the people, we have to call off the movement. We are not yet ripe. The 'power of truth' *(satyagraha)* is essentially based on non-violence and cannot act without it. We have to wait.

I decided to spend three days without eating, and I proposed to all to do the same for one day. I invited those who had stolen or killed to confess their misdeeds. And I clearly and decisively announced that until the whole nation would not learn the way of peace, the independence movement was suspended.

Gandhi knew perfectly well that the suppression of the movement would delay the sought-for arrival of independence, but for him conscience was more important than independence. Or, better, independence in his concept was nothing else than the emerging of a national conscience. Independence is not achieved by signing a paper or flying a flag, but by growing in dignity, morality and national character. Gandhi suspended the movement, and that was the best lesson he could give his people. With that he was not postponing independence but bringing it closer.

In a country as large and as complex as India, independence brought with itself a special problem: the diversity of races and colours, of languages and cultures, and above all of religions and of castes. In the question of castes it was not only a question of friction between caste and caste, but also between those with caste and those without caste, the outcaste, also called untouchables. Gandhi gave them another name, *Harijan,* or "children of God", and that is how they came to be called. The name itself encodes Gandhi's solution to the ancestral problem of untouchability. We are all children of God, all equal as men and women, as persons, as human beings, and nobody is more or less than any other for having been born in one family rather than another. The principle was clear, and Gandhi took every occasion to proclaim it and hammer it in.

The most famous occasion was the proposal to establish for the Harijans in the constitution of India separate constituencies for elections. The proposal was

well-meant, but it was ambiguous in its consequences, and in fact the main father of the constitution, Ambedkar, himself a *Harijan,* was in favour of it. But Gandhi rightly saw in that separation for elections a symbol and an instrument for the real separation of two groups in the nation, those with caste and those without it, and he opposed the measure tooth and nail. As the situation went from bad to worse, Gandhi had recourse to his usual personal weapon: the fast. He was at the time a prisoner in Yeravda prison in Pune, and there he declared that no food would pass his lips until the matter were properly settled. That fast brought Gandhi near death. The nation was on tenterhooks, and the whole world followed day by day the agony of his weak body as a docile instrument of his firm spirit. Tagore then took the leadership in writing to India, which listened to him when Gandhi was silent:

A dark and painful cloud is these days hovering over the whole of India. The Mahatma whose name is already synonymous of India has entered a heroic vow that can take him even to his own immolation in the cause of the unity of the people of India. The penance he has undertaken purifies all of us. His example and his suffering must awaken in the depth of our hearts the humanitarian feelings to see all men as equals and to love them without frontiers or divisions of any kind. The Mahatma's suffering has to become our salvation.

The effect of Gandhi's suffering was as wide as India and as deep as his own sincerity. On those days the people stopped going to cinemas or theatres, weddings were postponed, public prayers were organised in every square. The "Children of God" were allowed to enter the temples into which they had been forbidden to go, they were invited to draw water from wells formerly reserved for caste people, even public meals were organised in which people with or without caste would sit by each-other. It was a national effort, a coming together in an until then unknown way, a new beginning. There was a unanimous universal reaction, the proposal of separate constituencies was rejected, and Gandhi took food. A tragedy was avoided. And the fundamental principle of the equality and dignity of all men was established. It is true that a centuries-old prejudice cannot be eradicated in one day, but the beginning had

been made and the campaign would continue under Gandhi's inspiration. His example had made history.

The other threat to the unity of the country was the nation-wide division between followers of the two great religions, Hindu and Muslim. India has the great privilege and the great responsibility of harbouring in her midst since time immemorial almost all of the world religions. Kalelkar, whom I have often quoted, kept telling me many times till the end of his life that India's historic mission was the encounter, understanding and flowering of all religions side by side. "God", he would fervently repeat, "has put together on our soil from time immemorial all the great religions, and so we cannot call any of them foreign. When a stranger marries my daughter, he ceases to be a stranger to me and becomes my son-in-law. In the same way, even the religions that have come to us from outside India, as they have been accepted by Indians, they themselves become Indian, and so, together with Hinduism, Buddhism and Jainism which originated in India, Zoroastrianism, Christianity and Islam have now settled among us and belong to us. They too are our family. It is up to us to get all these religions to understand one another and to enrich and complement each other. That is the mission of India." Kalelkar himself was a Sarasvat Brahmin and he had found it hard to accept that other religions, particularly those that allow the eating of meat and the drinking of alcoholic drinks, were comparable to Hinduism, and he told me it was Gandhi himself in a personal and sustained effort that finally succeeded in convincing him that no religion monopolises truth and that, precisely because the spiritual reality surpasses our understanding, the different approaches and different experiences of all religions are necessary in order to give us a more complete idea of the supreme reality.

Gandhi also fasted for the unity of Hindus and Muslims. He fasted in the house of a Muslim friend, under observation by a Muslim doctor, and when he broke his fast after twenty-one days, he did so by taking from the hands of a Muslim friend a glass of lemon water. It was during those trying days that he wrote:

Up till now we have been making efforts to change the hearts of the English people, and we'll continue to do so till we get the desired result. But before that we have to work to change our own heart, all of us, both Hindus and Muslims. Before independence comes love. We have to achieve understanding and appreciation of the beliefs of others, however different they may be from ours, being ready even to tolerate other people's prejudices and superstitions. And above all, we have to foster mutual trust. Trust in all and trust in ourselves, which all in the end is trust in God. This unconditional trust will make it possible for us to love each other as brothers.

Gandhi said those trying days were for him "days of a great inner peace, happiness, and grace." The national problem, however, was large and deep and could not be solved by a single person however great his influence might be. Gandhi had to fast again. And Gandhi had to face at the end of his life the tragedy that cast a shadow over his achievements: the division of his beloved homeland into two nations, India and Pakistan, with a sharp division between Hindus and Muslims which caused untold sufferings for a length of years. Dividing India was dividing Gandhi's heart. He loved all. He even offered Jhinnah, the Muslim leader, the place of prime minister in an undivided India and got the two pretenders, Nehru and Patel, to accept the proposal. But he could not get Jhinnah to accept it. Gandhi insisted, against the opposition of the Indian leaders, that Pakistan would be paid all that India had promised on division. He announced he would go to visit Pakistan shortly. But he couldn't do it. A fanatic Hindu, representing those who thought that Gandhi was siding with Muslims against his own countrymen and fellow Hindus, shot him three times in the chest when Gandhi was walking to his prayers in the Birla House garden in New Delhi. The problem for whose solution Gandhi fought, lived, and died, remained unsolved. Gandhi, again, continues to be a very actual presence.

08. THE CULT OF EXCELLANCE

Gandhi summed up in one word all his doctrine and teaching on the way to independence and freedom: excellence. To do things well. To do one's best in whatever one does, be it much or little, important or insignificant, public or private. Everything has to be done well. One has to give always one's best, be exacting with oneself, keep always the highest standards. The sad heritage of carelessness and lack of interest that British dominion had left behind, had now to come to an end. Working under a foreign power lowers standards of work as it is that foreign power that first profits from it without any appeal to personal effort and distinction on the part of the workers, and mediocrity sets in as the normal rule in public labour. Gandhi had to change that too. And in this, Gandhi again remains quite actual and practical, as we all are inclined to do things with the least possible effort and we feel the temptation to laziness, to the shortcut, to shabby work, to do things in a hurry and in any way, to cheat ourselves when we cannot cheat others. Carelessness is the great enemy of development, both for the person and for the nation. Gandhi set about defeating that enemy.

His first weapon was his own example. Someone drew his attention to the fact that when he quoted verses from the *Bhagauad Gita* in his public prayers, his Sanskrit pronunciation was defective. Gandhi took note of it and resolved to learn a proper pronunciation. He loved the *Gita* and even wrote a commentary on it. He quoted it often, and most of his listeners would not care about pronunciation. But for Gandhi it was enough to know that it was not right, and decided to learn the right one. Learning pronunciation takes time, and Gandhi could not find it at the moment. But he found it later. In jail. He had not forgotten his resolution, and the next time he became again a "government guest" with time in his hands, he decided to put it in practice.

In the Yeravda jail he asked Kalelkar, who was also in the same jail with him:

I want to learn how to pronounce Sanskrit properly. I admire your Sanskrit pronunciation as I've observed you when you teach our boys in class, that's why

I want you to teach me. Take me as one more of your students. Every time I make a mistake make me repeat the word as many times as necessary till I do it well. Don't take me as an important person, as a *'Mahatma'* who cannot be disturbed. If you think that way and you leave me with my imperfect pronunciation, that sin will be on your conscience. See what you do.

Kalelkar used to say that the only way to learn good pronunciation in any language was to 'fill one's ears', and so he took it upon himself to fill Gandhi's ears with Sanskrit. Besides, he underlined for him the words he mispronounced and he made him repeat them without relief. Kalelkar used to say that he had never had such a keen student, and at the end of their stay in jail he gave him a diploma as 'Champion of Sanskrit pronunciation'. Something that troubled Gandhi till the end of his life was his bad handwriting. He wrote with both his hands, right and left, and his writing was as bad with one as with the other. Just as he wanted to have a good pronunciation, so he also wanted a good handwriting. But he never could get it. For all his efforts, he failed in his endeavour. Even the Mahatma had to admit defeat at times. He then quoted the Gujarati proverb: "You cannot put a new border on a clay vessel", that is, once the clay dries it is impossible to stick fresh clay on to it; and once the hand is used to write in one way, the muscles are hardened and conditioned and it is impossible to impose new ways on them. He had to resign himself to write as he did. For that same reason he insisted with young people that they should get used to write with a good and careful hand from the start so that they would not have to suffer later as he had to suffer.

He did succeeded in another endeavour, and that was the reform of spelling in his own Gujarati language. Gandhi suffered with the anarchy that obtained in Gujarati writing at the time. Each one wrote at will long and short vowels, half consonants and double letters, diphthongs and nasals *(anuswaras)*. There was no rule and no uniformity, and all efforts to bring order into chaos had failed. The order and dignity in society are reflected in the language it uses, and the Gujarati language at the time lacked any kind of fixed rules, norms, linguistic good manners. Gandhi used to say: "We are ashamed to commit even one

spelling mistake in English, and yet we write our own language in any way and we are not ashamed of it. We respect the language of the English people and we strive to write it to perfection, and we do not respect our own language and are not worried about its dignity. This situation has to come to an end." Gandhi brought it to an end. He asked Kalelkar (again!) to publish a dictionary with the proper spellings which would then become fixed and compulsory. The curious thing is that Kalelkar was not a Gujarati, but living with Gandhi he had learnt the language, had studied its history, had understood its spelling- and he wrote and published the dictionary. Gandhi wrote in its first page this single sharp sentence: "Hereafter nobody has the right to write Gujarati as he pleases." There was no official institution, no academy of language and no teaching body with the authority to impose a fixed spelling, but Gandhi's moral authority reached even language matters, and his signature on the first page of the dictionary was enough to make it into law and to get everybody to accept it. Today we write Gujarati as Gandhi ordered it.

The interesting point here is how Gandhi, who carried on his shoulders the burden of the whole country, the fight for independence, and a thousand complex problems of historic importance, did not forget lesser items like spelling. He saw everywhere the opportunity, the example, the parable of the supreme lesson he wanted to teach to all as the summary and practice of all his teaching: doing well whatever we do.

If Gandhi minded writing and wanted it well done, he also minded printing and wanted it done in the best way. I've already mentioned the fact that wherever Gandhi settled, one of his first concerns was to put up a printing press. He knew the importance of the written word, of the mass media, of the power to reach with a printed paper where he could not reach with a spoken speech. He used his presses daily, and he insisted that the printing should be always well done, without mistakes, without misprints, in neat and clear print. Gandhi left thousands of printed pages in his articles, books, messages of all kinds, and all of them had to be printed to perfection. Gandhi's message went forward not only in what he said in his writings but also in the neat and careful way they

were printed. Doing all things well. Good spelling. Good handwriting. Good printing. And, as in the following case told by Kalelkar, good translation:

It was but natural that when Gandhi settled in Ahmedabad, he would like to get translated into the language of the region, Gujarati, the writings of his 'political *guru*' Gokhale which had been published in Marathi and in English. He decided to begin with the first volume of Gokhale's essays and speeches on education. A well-known Gujarati writer, who also knew English well, was chosen and was entrusted with the translation. The translator finished his work, and the book was printed at once in our Navajivan Press. Before proceeding to binding the books, the only thing left was for Gandhi to see it and to write the introduction.

Gandhi passed on the book to his secretary Mahadev to have a look at it. Mahadev did with great care whatever he did, and he soon realised that the book had not been well translated and would not please Gandhi. He told him as much: 'The translation is not faithful to the original, the language is poor and with mistakes.'

Gandhi is never satisfied with an overall accusation. He asks for proofs. Before him the accuser becomes the accused. Mahadev knew it and he was ready. He showed Gandhi several passages in the book with clear examples of bad translation and poor language. Gandhi told him: It's all right. I see your opinion and your proofs. Now show the book to Narhari, who knows about these matters, and ask him for his independent opinion.' Mahadev was not pleased to see that Gandhi would not trust him, but he knew well Gandhi's way of acting and the care he took in everything; and besides, Mahadev was so sure his opinion was right that he didn't protest and did as he had been told.

Narhari was of the same opinion. But Gandhi was not yet satisfied. He said again: 'All right, now show it to Kalelkar.' To the translator's undoing, my opinion coincided with the other two. When Gandhi saw that the three opinions coincided, he became serious and said: 'Then there is no other way. I will not put before Gujarat something badly done. I will take care to let the translator

know. You now burn down the whole edition so that not a single copy is left out'

The book was thick and thousands of copies had been printed. If we had sold them as waste paper we could have got some money. But Gandhi did not allow it. The whole edition ended in a good bonfire-and in the scolding the good translator must have got, which, for what I know of Gandhi, must have been a good one.

I don't know how the translator felt, but I do know the salutary effect this incident had on all of us in those days in which we were setting up our quarters, the press, and the university. The holy fear of the Lord took hold of us. We saw how Gandhi would not compromise on anything. Everything had to be well done. No mercy on defaulters. So we decided to do everything in the best possible way, writings, translations, printing, also our classes. Maybe in checking the translator, Gandhi had meant to teach all of us a lesson. That bonfire did us a lot of good.

The Navajivan Press stands to this day as a model printing press. Every book printed in it carries on itself the seal of excellence, the implicit message to do well whatever we do. The tradition Gandhi so painstakingly established has been kept up. The name itself that was chosen for the institution pleased Gandhi: Navajivan. Its three syllables Navajivan form a palindrome that is equally read forwards and back-wards and lends itself to calligraphic designs. The best is its meaning: "New Life". Pronouncing it over its historical background, it reminds us of Gandhi's fundamental teaching: the way to a new life is doing all things well.

09. USING TIME

The meaning of time is different in the East and in the West. In the West time is linear, it does not come back, there is only one life which has to be lived against the clock, in a hurry, hour by hour, minute by minute, with the regret of 'wasting time' and the doubtful urge to 'make the best of your time'. Punctuality is a virtue, and using one's time to the full is a trait of the efficient manager. In the Orient, however, the universally accepted belief in reincarnation, the conception of history as recurring cycles, the ages of the world that inexorably return to be again what they once had been, remove the urgencies of the calendar and the hurry in action. The eternal snake bites its tail and the whole universe turns round on itself. In the Gujarati language the same word, *kale,* is equally used to refer to "before" or to "after". I was utterly mystified when I asked the teacher in my early Gujarati class where in the textbook was a certain reference with respect to the chapter we were doing, and he answered, *agal*. I consulted my dictionary. It said that *agal* meant "before" or "after". Much help. I could not find the reference, but I did learn an important feature of the new language. There is no "before" and no "after". Everything turns round and round. No hurry. No "wasting time" because time will always obligingly come again. No urgency to do anything, as there are before us innumerable reincarnations in which we'll have ample time to do it. I remember with glee how people laughed when they saw an American tourist "doing", as they say, the seven bridges of the River Jhelum in Shrinagar in a *shikara,* the flat boat meant to be leisurely driven by a single oar, but which he had hired eight oarsmen to propel at full speed while he took pictures right and left with his camera to record his achievement. Two cultures in contrast.

This concept of time as indeed "no-time" leads to the peace, the leisure, the ease that the Orient represents and exemplifies, and which the West is beginning to discover with wonder and trying to learn to its own profit. But there is a danger in this concept, and this danger is also quite real. Peace and ease can degenerate into carelessness, and restfulness can come to mean

laziness. Gandhi, an Oriental himself but always open to any positive influence, combined Oriental virtues with all the good and valid attitudes he had observed in the West, and he strove to transmit them to his people. His practical mind realised the value of time, and he showed in his person and with his example the art of living day by day and minute to minute without ever losing one's peace. He was punctual to a fault, priced every minute, worshipped timetables, revered appointments. He hardly owned anything, but together with his wire spectacles and his wooden sandals, he always wore an old pocket watch which, missing a pocket, kept hanging outside from his belt. The whole country ran to that watch.

The year 1916, the annual session of the 'Gujarat National Assembly' presided by Gandhi took place in Godhra. Tilak, the undisputed national leader in the generation before Gandhi, who was old by then, was specially invited to the meeting. Gandhi arrived punctually as usual with him, and Tilak arrived half an hour late-also as usual with him. It was not easy to upbraid Tilak in private, let alone in public, but Gandhi did it in a masterful way. He welcomed Tilak on the dais with due honour and heartfelt affection. He praised his long and dedicated labours for the independence of India for so many years by then, and then he added with a smile: 'Though, one thing. If the independence of India comes half an hour late, the delay will be due to Tilak.' People laughed and clapped ... and Gandhi had taught his lesson.

Coming late for an appointment with Gandhi was missing it. Late arrivals were not admitted. Partly because Gandhi would by then be engaged with someone else, and partly to teach the latecomer a lesson. Once a rather important person protested at not being received by Gandhi, and he even claimed that he had arrived in time but it was Gandhi's watch that was fast. Gandhi had him informed that when one goes to meet someone, he has to go by the watch of the person he is going to see. And he added without pity: "Tell him to come tomorrow ... and to come in time."

Once Gandhi had appointed Kalelkar to represent him in a meeting in a village from which they would come to fetch him at the appointed time. The time

came and went, and Gandhi, whose attention nothing escaped, noticed that Kalelkar was still at home. He asked him at once: 'How is it you've not yet started?' Kalelkar answered: 'I'm ready and waiting, but I cannot go unless they come to fetch me. I don't know the way and I have no car.'

Gandhi got angry with him and getting serious told him before everybody: 'That is not right. As soon as it was time you should have started. What does it matter if you have no car? You can walk. If it takes you two days walking, let it take you two days. And if you don't know the way, ask for directions on your way. You are not responsible for arriving on time, but you are responsible for starting on time. As soon as it is time we must start off. If you are not ready to do it that way, you cannot represent me.

Gandhi not only told his followers to do it that way, but he always did it so himself. In Ahmedabad people still remember the day on which Gandhi cycled through the city's streets. Those who were to come to fetch him did not come in time, and so he started off on foot. On his way he saw a worker of his institution on a cycle, he borrowed it from him, sat on it and in that way went to the appointed place in the midst of the surprise and the greetings of those who recognised him along the way. There was no photographer on hand to record the scene, but it has been faithfully kept in the memory of Ahmedabad citizens who still point out today the way Gandhi went that day on his cycle. The next episode is not so well-known but is even more typical and more exemplary.

Gandhi was in Bombay and had to go by the evening train to Delhi. A Bombay businessman who was present when they were planning with Gandhi how to take him to the railway station that evening volunteered immediately and said: 'Don't worry, I'll send you my car with my driver. No problem.' Gandhi answered:

'I accept, but the car must be here in time.

' 'Tell me the time you want it here.'

'Four o'clock here in this house.'

'At four sharp the car will be here.'

As the time approached in the evening, Gandhi finished his work and got ready to go. At five to four he looked outside and nobody had come. He looked at his watch and waited for five minutes. At four sharp he told his secretary: "Mahadev, it is time, so I start off." And taking his walking stick he started walking at a fast pace as he knew how to do when he was going somewhere for an appointment.

The people around him were horrified when they saw him struggling alone in the midst of Bombay's mad traffic. The man of the house in which Gandhi was staying ran after him and shouted to him: 'Please, wait; I'll get you a taxi at once.' But Gandhi did not stop to listen and went on making his way at full speed.

Meanwhile the car and driver promised by the businessman arrived at the house. When the driver realised that it was his fault that such a great person had to start walking to the railway station, he was very sorry and afraid. Without losing any time, he started for the station in his car and caught up with Gandhi on the way. But Gandhi, without stopping in his way, told him: 'I'm not getting in your car. I'll reach the station on foot. I will pay the penalty for your fault. If I now get into your car, you will never learn. You have to reach in time and start in time. Don't you ever forget it.' He went on with his fast walking and reached the station in time.

Those who were waiting for him at the railway station were astonished when they saw him arrive on foot. He explained to them the situation and added: 'When that businessman comes to know, I'm afraid he will punish his driver and may even dismiss him. Tell him from me not to punish him. He's been sufficiently scared. But let everybody learn to be punctual.'

There was no time to make the speech he had prepared to be given in the railway station, but for Gandhi that lesson was more important than a speech.

There is no need for a comment to this story. Neither to the next one which I append:

The Saurashtra leader, Fulchandbhai, was staying for a time in Gandhi's headquarters in Ahmedabad. One day he went to see Gandhi and told him,

'I'll have to go out for a few days.'

'When do you want to go?'

'Tomorrow itself.'

'And when will you be back ?'

'Probably on Saturday, and if it can't be Saturday, then definitely on Sunday.'

'That will not do. The date must be fixed. If it is Saturday, Saturday, and it is Sunday, Sunday. Leaving things in the air is not allowed here.'

'All right. Then on Saturday evening I'll definitely be back.'

'Fine. And now take note. Once you give your word, you have to keep it. And in order to be on time for a given appointment, you have to keep it in mind and plan everything accordingly. So long as there is not a serious emergency, you have to appear in time. So, I expect one of these three things on Saturday evening:

either you appear here, or a letter arrives saying you are sick, or I get a telegram saying you have died. There is no fourth option.'

Gandhi's insistency gave fruits. His companions and followers were learning from him and were also beginning to tell others to do the same. Nothing gave Gandhi more joy than seeing his collaborators assimilate his principles and put them into practice. Ramnaresh Tripati, writer and poet of the time, tells his own experience:

The year 1918, the annual meeting of the circle of writers and poets took place in Bombay. The most important figures in letters and in politics were in attendance, and Gandhi was presiding. There were talks in Hindi, Gujarati and Marathi, and the list of speakers was quite long. My name was the last in the list. Seeing the list and my name in it, Gandhi asked me:

'How long are you going to speak ?'

'An hour and a half.'

'No. Three quarters of an hour.'

'I can't even begin with that.'

'You'll see how you manage. Three quarters of an hour.'

Those were the days of long speeches. Short speeches were not appreciated. I always spoke long and I had no practice in speaking briefly. For that occasion I had prepared a very long speech and I had no idea how to shorten it. But you had to obey Gandhi, and I did what I could. I suppressed full sections of my speech, shortened others, and kept looking at my watch all the time since I started. At the end of my speech I said: 'I had been granted forty-five minutes to speak, and I am finishing when it is exactly forty three minutes. I have two minutes left and I gift them to our president, Mr. Gandhi.'

Gandhi visibly rejoiced when he heard I was giving him two minutes and began clapping. Then he said: 'This is the first time in my life that someone presents me with a gift of time. I appreciate it all the more as more often people take my time from me. Even when I ring the bell for them to finish, they don't pay attention and go on speaking. Let all imitate the example given today. Saving time is also patriotism.'

And finally the most remarkable (and most expensive) case of Gandhi's punctuality.

Gandhi was travelling through the Northeast of India with a very tight programme of meetings in several places, among them a village called Navabganj. There were very long distances and a difficult terrain. To reach Navabganj, Gandhi and his companions had to take the Calcutta mail till Podadih, change there to the Daka mail till Goalando, and from there to Navabganj by steamer. But some landslides delayed the departure of the Calcutta mail, and although work to open the road again was started immediately, they calculated they would not arrive in time to catch the steamer to Navabganj, so that they would have to suppress the visit they had announced and programmed for that place. They were about to do that when

Gandhi spoke and said: 'I have promised to reach that village in this steamer, and they are awaiting me. I have to keep my appointment with the same exactness and punctuality with which I keep an appointment with the viceroy. They are not any lower. Do whatever has to be done and spend whatever has to be spent, but I want to be in Navabganj at the time we have announced.'

Satishbabu, who was the boss of Calcutta and travelled with Gandhi, proposed to set up a special train for the trip, and Gandhi accepted the proposal. They had to pay 1140 rupees for it, which was a fortune at the time, but Gandhi arrived in time for his appointment in the village where they were waiting for him.

Gandhi could be stingy when it came to money. He belonged to the merchant caste, kept in his mind an account of all he spent, and saved systematically. One day he could not find the stub of a pencil he used, and asked Mahadev to look for it. Mahadev gave him another pencil, but Gandhi refused to take it. He said that the other had still some led in it and it had to be used. He insisted till they found it. For soap he used a smooth stone. Once towards the end of his life when he was travelling through hostile territory not without danger, they realized at night that they had left the stone in the previous village, and Gandhi made a young girl, Maniben, to fetch back the stone. Shankarlal Banker told me in person how he was put to shame when he was in jail next to Gandhi and wanted to show off how he washed his own clothes, and proceeded to wash them in front of Gandhi to be seen by him. Gandhi observed him for a while and then told him severely: "That's not how it is done. You are spending such an amount of water and of soap that you would be ruined if you had to live from that job. I'm going to tell you how it is done." With that, Gandhi began to wash the clothes using very little water and soap as though there were in a drought. And yet he gave the clothes a thorough wash. This same Gandhi who could be such a miser in his own expenses, could also be prodigal when there was question of keeping an appointment. Nehru once said: "It is quite expensive to keep Gandhi poor." And Gandhi himself liked to repeat Nehru's words with a mischievous smile. He was austere with himself, but he did not hesitate to go

to high expenses when it was question of principle and of the education of the people. Reverence for time was one of the main points in his programme to educate India.

10. OBEDIENT DISOBEDIENT

Together with respect for time, respect for the law was another of the great lessons Gandhi set out to teach to India and to the world. There he met with a difficult problem that required all his talent and all his tact to find a solution. Gandhi himself opposed the unjust laws of the British, he disobeyed them himself and incited others to disobey them. That was easily understood. But with that came the real and immediate danger that a people that had been taught to disobey the laws of the British would, on independence, go on to disobey their own laws.

It is easy to organise a protest. It is easy to raise the masses. Everybody knows how to leave work, crowd the streets and shout against anybody or anything, sometimes not even knowing why and against what they are shouting. Today they take the street because Gandhi has asked them to; tomorrow they may be doing it because someone without Gandhi's balance and seriousness and responsibility is asking them. Once they had done it for an authentic cause, the method is consecrated and can then be used for any other cause, whether right or not. The crowds do not reflect, they are led, and once used to protesting, they can go on protesting against anything. It is easy to unleash the storm. It is easy to incite people to disobey its rulers. The difficult thing is to inculcate respect for the law at the same time as it is being opposed, to educate the crowds, to maintain responsibility while granting liberty.

Gandhi undertook the delicate and almost contradictory task of taking the people to the disobedience of the actual laws and preparing them at the same time for the obedience to future laws. Disobedience now, yes, but "civil" disobedience, responsible, mature, limited to this moment and to this law, keeping at the same time the full respect for the legislator, for law in general, and for all other laws in the concrete. A lifelong education. A shared responsibility.

The method for that education was Gandhi's typical method: the example, the image, the anecdote. To do so that all may see; to speak out so that all may

hear. Let all see how the promoter of disobedience obeys, how the leader of independence submits himself. Gandhi showed in his own person in a thousand telling episodes that delicate balance, or, better, that bold synthesis between observance and rebellion, and carefully distinguished the unjust law against which to revolt from the just law he would always definitely obey. With that graphic way of exposing his doctrine he could make it reach all corners of India in its full extension.

The British government, without realising it or wanting it, repeatedly offered Gandhi the best way to practice his teaching, and Gandhi made use of it to the full. They sent Gandhi to jail. Gandhi was sent to jail again and again for having publicly disobeyed some law, and then once in jail he painstakingly obeyed the smallest injunction, rule, order or directive of his jailers. The preacher of disobedience, obeyed. Gandhi, who did not recognise the validity of British rule in India, accepted the jurisdiction of the jail authorities over the inmates and over himself. His exemplary submission behind jail walls was in sharp contrast to his challenge to power in the streets. This contrast made concrete and visible the lesson he wanted to teach and facilitated its acceptance.

The first to learn the lesson were his jail mates. Shankarlal Banker, political prisoner with him in the Yeravda jail, narrates the following instructive episode.

Dastane, the well-known Congress leader in Bhusaval, was condemned to forced labour for his active participation in the non-cooperation movement. He was sent to the same jail in which Gandhi was, although he could not communicate with him, and he was ordered to work according to the law and the sentence he had received. He refused to work, and as a punishment he was flogged.

When Gandhi came to know that, he went to the jail director and told him: 'In my opinion the prisoner who has been sentenced to forced labour, whoever he may be and for whatever motive it may be, has to work. Our volunteers challenge that law with full restraint and respect while they are free, but once in jail they have faithfully to obey all jail laws and regulations. That is how I

understand it, and if you allow me to speak to Dastane, I'll explain the matter to him and will convince him.'

The director appreciated Gandhi's attitude and initiative, but he had orders not to allow him to speak with the other prisoner, and he refused permission. Gandhi then sent a message, and Dastane wrote back to him: 'I accept your reasons and your advice, and I'm ready to work. I have only a difficulty: I first refused to work and was flogged; so if I now begin to work, all will believe I do it out of fear of the whip. In order to avoid that misunderstanding I want to be able to publicly say that if I now am ready to work, that is because Gandhi has sent me a message and has opened my eyes and made me realise my true duty.'

Meanwhile, Gandhi had already informed the director of the message he had sent, and had asked that if that was against the rule, he himself should be punished. The director, instead, admired his nobility of character and thanked him for having so skilfully solved a worrisome situation.

Gandhi's own wife was also witness and object of the care her husband always had to observe all rules in jail in a touching and instructive episode.

Gandhi's wife, Kasturba, who was at large, went to see her husband in jail with all due permissions. She came at the appointed time, and husband and wife got together in the presence of a jail official as prescribed and began to talk. They had been given half an hour for their meeting.

The jail official after a while saw that there was no need for his presence when Gandhi and his wife were such honourable people and behaved so exemplarily, and so, in order to give them some privacy, he quietly withdrew without saying anything and left them alone.

After half an hour the official came back and asked them with a smile: 'You must have been able to speak quite freely, isn't it ?' He expected to be thanked for his gesture in leaving quietly, but Gandhi answered him with resignation: 'Speak ? We just talked a little at the beginning while you were here. After that we kept quiet.' - 'How was that?' the jailer asked with sad concern. Gandhi explained to him in all sincerity: 'I know perfectly well all jail regulations, and

one of them is that for an inmate to be able to speak with a visitor, a jail officer has to be present. I noticed that a short while after our meeting began you had to leave, no doubt in order to attend to other business which I fully understand. Since then we kept quiet till now that you've come back and so now we take leave of each other.'

Gandhi had outjailed his jailer. The poor official must have remained dumbfounded. He meant to do Gandhi a favour, but he had not reckoned with Gandhi's own approach. Although in a way he did do him a favour: he gave him another image and anecdote with which to broadcast to India's people at large his message of fidelity to the law. Gandhi loved his wife but he willingly sacrificed a half an hour talk with her in order to give example of obedience to the law. He went on teaching from jail.

In the same jail there was an African prisoner from Somalia called Adam who had been there for many years. He was put in charge of Gandhi as the authorities thought that since he was not an Indian he would not easily come under Gandhi's influence. But they were wrong. The first three days he acted as Gandhi's zealous guardian observing all he was doing and not leaving him alone for a single moment. On the fourth day he complained to a companion: 'Why have they set me to watch this saint ? He gets up at four o'clock to pray. Then he is the whole day so busy that he has no time to talk with anybody. Watching him is a waste of time.'

Ever since then Adam tried, not watching Gandhi, but seeing how he could help him. After a few days he came to Gandhi with that day's newspaper, *The Times of India,* in his hand. Adam did know that political prisoners were strictly forbidden to read the paper, but he also knew that all, and particularly the political prisoners, were always eager to read it, and the day they got the paper on the sly was a feast day for them. He wanted to do Gandhi that favour and went to him with the paper. Gandhi realised at once the situation:

'What is this, Adam?'

'The paper, sir. It is today's paper. All fresh news. I've brought it especially for you.'

'I'm sorry but I can't read the paper. It is against the prison rules, and you know it well. Take it away at once.'

'But all of them like it! I've got it with great difficulty and I've got it inside at my own risk. Have a look at least.'

'I realise all that you are saying, but I cannot accept it. It is against the rules. Take that paper back immediately and burn it. Else I'll have to inform the authorities about it.'

Gandhi was human and he would have been delighted to read the paper. And if he had done it, probably no one would have come to know about it and nobody would have objected. But he was aware of his responsibility as the leader of the nation. His actions were law, his behaviour was rule. And he did not read the paper.

But this episode has a more human end, which throws a special light on Gandhi's character. In spite of his apparent hardness at time, Gandhi was not rigid, was not inhuman, was not insensible. He knew how to yield, how to set aside principles for a while, how to recognise the exception to a rule, and above all he knew how to appreciate a touch of humour in a situation. That happened beautifully in this occasion of the newspaper.

Adam was left helpless. But he felt unable to burn the paper. After so much work and so much risk he was not going to throw all that out of the window. So he thought of a trick. He insisted and told Gandhi: 'You are a great man, you are a saint and you don't read the paper. That is all right. But I am not a saint, it is a long time since I left my country, and surely in that paper there will be some news of my land. I don't know how to read and so I cannot get the news. Will you be so good as to see whether there is any news of my country in the paper and read it out to me?'

Gandhi saw through the proposal and smiled. That was an indirect way to make him read the paper. And Gandhi did not want to disappoint his devoted guardian and helper. Precisely at the time there was a war going on in Somalia, and Gandhi read out to Adam the news of his country. Adam showed great joy,

not at having got news of Africa but for having got Gandhi to read the paper, and he went out jumping like a child and shouting: 'I convinced him, I convinced him! Gandhi has finally read the paper!' And Gandhi also rejoiced with his joy.

Gandhi knew how to make an exception to the rule, and that attitude tells more in his favour than his habitual insistence on keeping the rules. This shows that when Gandhi insisted on keeping the rules, he was not doing it out of any mechanical rigidity or lack of understanding. He was understanding and flexible, and he could show it when the occasion came. He knew how to please a simple man, even if he had to abandon his throne of *Mahatma* for once. By doing this he was emerging as a true *Mahatma*.

Gandhi spent several years of his public life in jail. Apart from his daily work in his cell, he made use of those days to proclaim with his exemplary obedience the respect to the law, to authority, to the government. An image that sums up this constant and conscious attitude of Gandhi was that of the British judge who, on Gandhi's entering the hall as an accused, against all protocol, norm or tradition, stood up from his chair in respect and requested all those present to do the same in homage to the man he, as a judge, was going to condemn while, as a man, admired and revered. He had learnt Gandhi's lesson on obedience and disobedience.

11. CONSTANT WORK

In jail, Gandhi got up early and worked through the day. Not only in jail, but wherever he might be throughout his life. His constant work was an essential trait in his character and a fundamental element in his efficiency. This is often forgotten, and Gandhi is often represented as so quick in his analysis and genial in his decisions that he hardly needed a special study or preparation for his activities. This is quite far from the facts and is a great obstacle to the understanding of Gandhi's real greatness. He was a conscientious, meticulous, indefatigable worker. He studied all problems, prepared his visits, meditated solutions. His reaction before any new situation was to collect information, analyse all aspects, get references, interrogate all concerned, consult people. No hurry and no improvisation. That entailed much work, and Gandhi took it up without hesitation. Hard work was his faithful companion through life.

A typical example was his reaction to the Jallianbag massacre in Amritsar. At the most painful moment of the fight for independence, when General Dyer ordered his soldiers to fire in cold blood against a fully peaceful crowd of men, women, and children leaving behind many dead and seriously wounded, the whole nation grieved and the political leaders multiplied accusations and recriminations against the British government that was responsible for that massacre. Gandhi grieved the most, but his reaction was more concrete and more decisive. Instead of a general protest he ordered a detailed investigation. He directed it personally and took upon himself the writing of the final report. Kalelkar recalls:

The investigation lasted three months. 1700 written reports were ordered. All this had to be analysed, checked, summarised. Gandhi locked himself in his office and devoted himself exclusively to this work. He suffered when reading the stories of that shedding of blood as unjust as it was inhuman. He literally worked day and night without hardly any interruption. He slept only two and a half hours at night, and sometimes in the afternoon he became so tired that his body refused to go on.

One day I observed how he had remained seated with a paper in his left hand and his pen in the right, and had fallen asleep. I didn't touch him to wake him up, but he himself immediately opened his eyes, shook himself slightly and started again to write. He did not spare himself.

That was a special occasion, a national emergency, but for Gandhi such intensity at his work was normal. This is now a witness' account of the second stage of his fight for independence when he was not living in Ahmedabad any more, as he had promised not to come back to his headquarters there until independence were obtained. He had shifted to Vardha, in the geographical centre of India, graphically to stress again that he belonged to the whole of India without distinction of provinces, and that his mission was for all.

Banarasidas Chaturvedi went to visit Gandhi in Wardha. Gandhi had given him a half-an-hour appointment at nine o'clock at night. They spoke exactly till half past nine. Gandhi was in a good mood and he laughed a lot and made his visitor laugh. When the visit was over, he told him: 'Now leave me, please. I've got up this morning at one thirty and have only rested for twenty-five minutes in the afternoon.' Banarasidas was astonished when he heard that. From one thirty in the morning to nine thirty at night it's twenty hours. And Gandhi had been working non-stop all the time. When telling this anecdote, Banarasidas used to add: Gandhi works too much to make up for our laziness.'

The daily mail was a recurring, monotonous, heavy, important exercise every day. Wherever Gandhi might be, his room looked like a post office. He got hundreds of letters every day. In his headquarters in Ahmedabad a room has been converted into a museum where some curious specimens of the letters he received are kept. An envelope bears this address: "To Gandhi wherever he may be." Another bears his name without any other indication. Yet another doesn't even bear that: instead, Gandhi's face is drawn on it. And the letter reached him. The postman in the smallest Indian village was familiar with that face and felt responsible for the letter being properly delivered. An eye witness describes Gandhi's daily letter writing:

Gandhi receives dozens of letters and he reads and answers them personally, to the extent that he even writes by hand the address on each envelope. He insists that each letter has to be answered the same day it is received, and he does not go to bed until he has done with the day's mail. Sometimes his hand gets so tired with the writing that I've seen him pass the pen from his right hand to his left and go on writing with the left, as he has also known how to do that.

He also takes care that the letters have to be mailed on the same day or next day in the morning. When he is travelling, the first thing he asks on arrival at a new place is, 'At what time does the mail go ?' And then every day at that time he asks whether the mail has been taken to the post or not.

He publishes two papers every week. *Young India* in English and *Navajivan* in Gujarati. The day the matter has to be sent to the press, the activity around Gandhi is worth seeing. In one corner, translations are prepared from one language to the others, in another the articles are being typed, and in yet another they are placed in the corresponding envelopes and the stamps are affixed. Gandhi oversees everything and gives orders as required. The articles he has not written himself he reads always carefully before they are sent. Everything has to be ready by mail time. Gandhi then asks who is going to take the mail and when will he start. Thus the tide gets over ... till the next week.

Another point to be mentioned and to be placed in its proper context is Gandhi's insistence on manual work. Manual work is not well regarded in India as it is something that belongs to the lower classes, even lower castes which is worse as that seems to place a stigma on it. I learnt that lesson at my own cost the day I taught my first mathematics class in Gujarat University. On entering the classroom I noticed that the blackboard was all written over, and to save time I did what my school and college teachers in Spain used to do every day in the same situation and with all naturalness, that is, I handed the duster to a student in the first row and signalled to him to wipe the blackboard clean. Horror broke loose! The student blushed and refused to take the duster. The whole class stood up ready to protect and defend the victim. They accused me

before the Rector of the University of asking a boy of a good family to do a menial job unworthy of him before everybody. The good Rector understood my ignorance and warned me not to do it again. To work with one's hands is denigrating, and to ask a student to wipe the blackboard before the whole class is a public humiliation. Though, ironically, that makes the teacher perform the unseemly task. Unless he, as I also learned in due time, calls a servant to clean the blackboard.

An Indian friend of mine confessed to me that the first time he had taken a suitcase in his hands was in New York airport when on arrival in his first journey abroad he found to his utter surprise that there were no porters. Such a thing was unthinkable for him, but he had to do what he had never done in his life, so he took his two suitcases in his two hands and walked ahead as everybody else was doing. Partly, this is the Manichean heritage we all bear inside us, according to which matter always stains by itself, and contact with it has to be avoided as far as possible; partly it is the concept of caste that limits certain works and tasks to certain groups as unclean; and partly the natural laziness that makes me prefer that others do the dirty work for me. The result is a universal and harmful prejudice that hinders the normal course of labour, lowers before society those who perform certain tasks, ignores the value and dignity of the human person with its body, its hands, and all that they do. Gandhi rose up against that prejudice and inveighed against it in word and in action.

We don't understand-Gandhi's words-the dignity of manual work. We have divorced our body from our soul, and our hands from our brain. There are millions of people among us who do not use their hands in work, and that is a tragedy. We are lame in practice. For many people the hand is no more than a foot, given the limited use they make of it. In reality, the hand is the glory of man, his special attribute, his most valuable possession. When we don't use it as we should, nature condemns us to be maimed ... in body and soul.

The image many people have of Gandhi, his most repeated and commented photograph, is that of him in advanced age with only a little white hair on his

head, sitting down and bent over a spinning wheel with his full attention on it. The spinning wheel was his inseparable companion. As soon as his hands were freed, he started spinning. He could spin while he talked, thought, or prayed. He set his hands to work lovingly, skilfully, gently. Spinning was not a distraction for him. He called it a sacrament. He liked to say that the wheel's circumference is small, but its message reaches the whole round world. A message of identification with the working masses, a message of simplicity, of self-sufficiency, of independence, of patriotism. He went to the length of saying: "I would like to die with my hand on the spinning wheel."

Gandhi was good at the wheel. And he could even make a political use of it. When he went to visit the royal family in London he thought of bringing a gift for the Queen Mother. The gift was a shawl made of cloth he had woven himself. There may not be many more valuable gifts in the collection of gifts in Buckingham Palace.

12. CARE OF THE BOY

If Gandhi set his body to work, he also looked after it with care. Thus he also showed that our body is important, even essential, for the wellbeing of the individual ... and of the country. In educating the nation for independence he wanted a healthy and strong nation in body and soul. He knew and quoted the Gujarati proverb: "Good health is man's wealth." Freedom from a foreign country was important, but freedom from sickness, malnutrition and misery was as important or more than political freedom. And, as usual, he began by experimenting with himself before beginning to teach others about the matter. One of Gandhi's biographers complains that when he sets about telling the story of his London stay in his autobiography, he devotes more space to his experiments with food than to his studies or his ideas. He was obsessed by the study of food, and kept making changes in what he ate and observing the effects of the changes on his health and his strength. He was a vegetarian in his family and religion, and only when he was fifteen he took meat by stealth for about a year; then he left it, and once in England he promised his mother not to eat meat, and at several stages in his life he took several vows related to food, as that of taking only one meal a day, of living on fruits only, of taking goat's milk instead of cow's milk, of taking no milk at all, of taking only five items in a meal ... with the amusing discussions between friends at the time of preparing the daily menu to determine whether the salt added to a vegetable counted for a separate item or not. Preoccupation about the kind of food and its effects accompanied Gandhi through life. "We are what we eat", he was fond of repeating, and he tirelessly went on carrying out his personal investigations about food.

Some see in Gandhi's attitude to food a kind of obsession or meanness. They don't realize that what Gandhi had was a scientific spirit that lead him to inquire and to investigate, to be based on facts, not on blind traditions or beliefs however venerable they might be, and who wanted to find out by himself, to experiment, to reach evidence. In other fields he could not

experiment by himself, but in the matter of food the laboratory was his own body, and so he insisted on the scientific method, on verifying hypotheses, on being ready to change his opinion if required by the facts. When his vegetarian bent led him to give up even milk, since after all milk comes from animals, he consulted a doctor and then followed his advice.

When Gandhi thought of giving up milk, he consulted Dr Harilal Desai. The doctor came every day and examined Gandhi. After a few days, Gandhi began having stomach ache. They waited for a few more days, and finally the doctor told him: 'You have been taking milk for many years, and on the other hand you eat so little that any change in your food affects you at once. In my opinion you should take milk again.' Gandhi answered: 'I had a great desire to do without it, but for me your opinion counts more than my own wishes. In any case I'm glad to have made the experiment, as now we know for certain what is to be done.' Since that day he took milk again.

There is a Sanskrit saying to the effect that, "He who controls his palate, controls all his senses". Gandhi gave much importance to the control of the palate, and included it in the vows that all inmates at his institution had to obey. (The other vows were: telling the truth, observing non-violence, sexual moderation, not using up in anything more than it was absolutely necessary, no private possessions, no foreign goods, wearing only self-spun clothes, using Indian languages over English, rejection of untouchability, fearlessness.) He wrote:

I'm convinced that the sense of taste resides not in the tongue but in the brain. A horse or a cow do not feel excited about eating as man does. We have to use our mind to control our appetite, not to excite it. We mistake the degree of complication in preparing food with the degree of civilization. The more spices we add, the more are needed; and on the contrary, the more we get used to simple meals, the more tasty they become.

Kalelkar told me about the problem he had on his arrival in Gandhi's institution. The daily food morning and evening was rice, but in the ashram, by Gandhi's order, it was cooked and taken with its husk. Kalelkar could not swallow it, and

he took his problem to Gandhi. Gandhi explained to him at leisure the advantages, not only for the spirit but also for the body, of rice with husk as against rice without its husk and therefore deprived of all its vitamins and fiber. Kalelkar accepted the argument, decided to try, got used little by little, and the moment came, as he himself told me, when white rice tasted insipid to him while with its husk it was much more tasty. And he told me again about Gandhi's principle: taste resides in the mind.

The most striking of all of Gandhi's meditations and experiments in his mind and his body was the one of sex abstinence. The Sanskrit word for chastity, used also in the modern Indian languages and to which no translation into Western languages can do justice, is *brahmacharya*. Gandhi went to its etymological root and interpreted it in its most general sense as "walking with Brahma", that is "living in a godly way", although in practice it is translated by continence or chastity. Indian tradition gives the utmost importance to this virtue, and it is common doctrine and belief, also accepted by Gandhi, that full spiritual development and final liberation after death cannot be attained without it. The word "semen" is translated by virya, which also signifies much more: its root "vir" reaches English through Latin in words like "virile", "virility", and the Indian word is used today to mean vital energy, strength, courage, and whatever virtue related to masculinity. Loss of virya is considered loss of strength, of health, of virility. Gandhi wrote these words which I quote with respect in spite of the manifest exaggeration they entail:

The real celibate will enjoy perfect health, and he will not even suffer from a cold. His body will reflect the shining of his spiritual power, his intelligence will be sharp and deep, his memory infallible, and he'll live in full use of all his physical and mental faculties till a very old age. He who conserves in himself the fluid of life, conserves his vitality and makes sure of his strength.

When Swami Vivekananda, who had an extra-ordinary memory, was asked what the secret of his fabulous memory was, he answered in all seriousness: "I have a good memory because I observe full chastity." When Kalelkar, who kept excellent health for ninety eight years, was asked by somebody in my presence

what was the secret of such a long life, he answered with a sense of humor and of reality: "I could answer that the secret was chastity which I faithfully observe since more than sixty years, and you would all believe me as that is a common opinion in India; but the truth is that I know real celibates who have been sick and have died young, and libertines who have lived long lives in the best health ..., so that the principle does not hold." We all present at the time round him laughed, as we knew the background of that belief, and I admired Kalelkar's spontaneous sincerity and humility in renouncing the aura his listeners were willing to surround him with. He knew the popular belief about the miraculous effects of celibacy, but he didn't take advantage of it. Gandhi was influenced by that belief as he also was influenced by the traumatic experience in his youth as he was in bed with his wife when his father died in the next room. He was very hard on himself reproaching himself of what he considered a blind passion which kept him from being by his father's side when he died. But more than that, it was the desire to undertake the cause of the service of the masses and of the country's freedom that lead him to practice and propagate the ideal of sexual control.

When he was thirty six and had been married for twenty four years, Gandhi, with his wife's agreement, decided to observe full sexual abstinence, and he faithfully carried out his resolution till death. He wrote about that decisive day:

The day I took that vow was the day I became free. My wife too became on that day a free woman, free from my authority and free from her obligation to satisfy my sexual urge. For me she became something sacred, and every woman became my mother or my sister. This decisive step helped me greatly, both in my own interior growth and in my consecration to the national cause. Whoever wants to serve the nation and to advance in the way of the spirit must observe complete celibacy, be he married or single.

Gandhi's insistence on hygiene and health was even more important and better reasoned out. This was the first lesson that had to be learned and to be taught.

Gandhi was once visiting a poor region in North India in the company of his wife, and he proposed to her that she would start a school for the children of the place. His wife answered him with her practical and realistic view of things: 'I don't even know the language of these people, so I cannot even teach them the alphabet. Do you want me to teach them in Gujarati which they don't understand ?'

Gandhi had an answer for everything and he answered her: The first subject you have to teach them is cleanliness, and for that there is no need of language. Wash them, bathe them, clean their eyes, teach them to brush their teeth, make them get accustomed to go about with clean hands and clean clothes. This is the fundamental education, and you can begin with it from this moment.'

Sickness was another focus of Gandhi's constant attention. In the care of the sick too he saw the service to the nation and to humanity, the exercise of love to all, and the identification with those who suffered. He personally took care of the sick around him, and he gave them of his time even taking it away from important state meetings. He wanted all to learn that same dedication, and he took up this work with generous conviction and sincere joy. Here is an example which speaks by itself:

The wise and revered professor, Parchure Shastri, had taken up in his old age social work in the villages and had contracted leprosy. He had lost his fingers and nose, and was full of open sores in a pitiful state. He wanted to see Gandhi before he died, as he had never seen him, and so he travelled to Vardha where Gandhi was at the time. He reached in the evening and he remained standing at the gate of the *ashram* without entering, asking only that Gandhi would come out for a moment so that he could see him. Someone gave the message to Gandhi: 'There is someone there outside who just wants to see you before he dies.'

Gandhi went out, looked round and recognized the professor at once. He greeted him with great affection and invited him: 'What are you doing there standing outside? Come to the *ashram* and stay with me.' The old man was

touched and protested in the midst of tears: 'And who will look after me there ? See in what state I am.' Gandhi cut him short: 'I will look after you. So long as I am here you will lack nothing. Come inside.'

Gandhi had to insist, and finally he convinced him. He accommodated him close to his own quarters, and every day he nursed him personally, cleaned his wounds, changed his dressings and gave him massage. He didn't miss a single day however busy he might be.

One day all the members of the executive committee of the National Congress were gathered together with Gandhi in an important meeting. In the middle of the session where a highly important matter was being discussed, Gandhi stood up to leave. Nehru stopped him: 'Where are you going? Your presence is indispensable for the points we are discussing, and you know it.' Gandhi excused himself: 'I have work outside.' Nehru took it ill and protested in a temper: 'Is there any work more important than the independence of the country?' Gandhi quietly answered: 'It is time for the care of the sick. Parchure Shastri is waiting for me for the daily cure. For me the care of the sick is more important than independence.' And he went on his work.

It is not that the care of the sick was more important than independence, but in Gandhi's mind and in reality it was part of it. Freedom had to be achieved not only from foreign domination but also from the slavery of bodily sickness; a fullness in political life as in physical and mental and cultural life. The body had to be trained for independence together with the mind and the soul. All was part of a unique programme, of a complete vision, of a total renaissance. Gandhi saw it, felt it, lived it out, and he spontaneously and naturally communicated that attitude to all those around him. It was more important for the members of the executive committee to see him cure a leper than for them to discuss with him the country's problems. All was a part of independence.

Gandhi himself was in his own body an example of what he preached. In spite of his fasts, his work, his cares, his constant travels and his heavy responsibilities, he always kept himself in good health in mind and body through his long life till his death at seventy nine. Three bullets on his chest

were needed to bring down that body he had lovingly and painstakingly trained for work.

13. THE ART OF PERSUATION

Gandhi's art of persuasion deserves attention. He was no orator, no dialectician, no preacher. His literary style in all his writings, which were abundant, is not brilliant or arresting or sweeping, let alone artistic. It is simple, clear, direct. He says what he has to say without any affectation, without passion, without any effort to convince. His prose befits his self-confidence as he knew what he wanted to say and how to say it clearly, trusting the reader to understand what is to be understood and to draw the conclusions that have to be drawn. That confidence in himself and in his readers marked his style and gave his prose and his voice that strange power that astonished those who remarked only on the unpretentious appearance of his speeches and his writings. Kalelkar remembers the following incident:

The year 1915, Gandhi went to Santiniketan, the literary, artistic, patriotic University Rabindranath Tagore had founded in Bengal. Many students lived there, and there was a legion of cooks and waiters to cook their meals and to serve them at table in their messes. Gandhi did not like that, and simply proposed that the students themselves would work in the kitchen and messes. Such a reform was according to Tagore's principles, but it remained to be seen whether the students would accept it or not, since the whole work would now come on their shoulders and it was to them a demeaning work fit for servants but not for students. But if they did not agree, nothing could be done. It was decided that they call a meeting that night for Gandhi to address them. Dinbandhu Andrews, who trusted his 'Mohan' as he called Gandhi familiarly using his name instead of his surname, told him encouragingly: 'Mohan, tonight you'll have to bring out all your eloquence. Prepare a good speech that may hypnotize them, or else the whole plan will collapse. It all depends on the way you speak.' Gandhi did not answer him.

In the evening we gathered all the students, and we were all impatient to hear the eloquent speech Gandhi had specially prepared. We were literally 'with our heart in our ears', as the saying goes. And what was what we heard? A weak,

thin voice, monotonous, almost cold; a kind of ordinary conversation, a brief and objective exposition of the matter. No eloquence, no enthusiasm, no fire. He didn't even invoke patriotism or insist on the plan's advantages. He just exposed the situation and sat down.

And yet his simple words had an immediate effect. I knew those students well, and I knew that working in the kitchen and in the dining room was the last thing they would agree to do. They had never done it and they would never do it. And yet as soon as Gandhi spoke, they took a free vote and the students themselves encouraged each other and they all voted in favour. We were all pleasantly surprised at the result. The only one who did not seem surprised was Gandhi.

Such was his eloquence: sincerity, simplicity, truth. When rhetoric is used to convince the audience, it often has the opposite effect; the listeners sense the hidden pressure, offer resistance, block acceptance. A direct and transparent exposition shows confidence in the justice of its own cause, and at the same time it trusts also the sincerity of the public for the right decision at the end. That was Gandhi's method, and those were its gratifying results.

My favorite example of Gandhi's persuasive power is the following, which is also told by Kalelkar. There is no question here of any political problem but of something more difficult, a family quarrel. Gandhi carried on his shoulders the weight and the responsibility of the government of the whole country, but he did not think it below himself to take up little family frictions if he could be helpful in them. And he sought the solution with the same patience, the same tact, and the same knowledge of people and analysis of circumstances he applied to problems of a national scale. Here is the sample:

A family related to Gandhi was faced with a problem to which nobody could find a solution. They had celebrated the betrothal of their daughter with her future husband. Betrothal in India is considered as serious as the wedding itself, and the undoing of it would bring opprobrium on both the families of the bride and the bridegroom, and would make it difficult for them to find other partners even for the brothers and sisters of the betrothed ones, as nobody would trust

their families any more. To break a betrothal was just unheard of. But that was precisely what had happened in this case. The bridegroom just refused to marry the bride. They all brought all pressure on him to convince him, threaten him, persuade him, but without success.

Finally, discouraged and defeated, they appealed to Gandhi. They did feel bad to trouble him with such a small matter in the middle of all his duty to the country, but for them it was a matter of life and death, and they could not find any other way. They went to see Gandhi, invoked their family ties, and set the case before him. The two families were present in full with all their young and old members in their numbers, they were all pressing their case, unanimously asking him to convince the bridegroom. During three long days Gandhi found time in the midst of his busy schedule, and spoke with the lad gently and leisurely, trying to convince him. After all, the boy had agreed to marry the girl, and if he now refused, he would cause serious difficulties to his bride and her brothers and sisters, as well as to his own brothers and sisters, and of course to his own parents and those of the girl. But all to no avail. The boy was stubborn in the extreme, and all could see the unpleasant character he had. Yet he could not stand the constant pressure brought on him by all, and finally, after three days he yielded and told Gandhi he was ready to marry the girl. Gandhi made him repeat that before all, and the girl's father breathed a sigh of relief and profusely thanked him for having achieved what nobody had been able to achieve.

Then Gandhi told all of them to go out, even the boy and the girl, and remained alone with the girl's parents. He told them sternly: 'You have what you wanted. The boy has said yes. You can marry him to your daughter tomorrow if you want. But you yourselves have seen all along these three days as I and all have seen that this boy has an impossible character. Your daughter will never be happy with him. I know all the problems this entails for you, but still I ask you straightforwardly: Do you, even after having seen all this, still want your daughter to marry him ?'

I-follows Kalelkar-was watching the bride's father's face. It reflected the heavy battle that was being waged behind it. He could not bring himself to say either yes or no. Gandhi kept on looking straight at him with that look of his eyes that seemed to pierce through the person. A tense silence went on for quite a while. At the end, the bride's father broke down and said with a shaking voice: 'You are right, you are right. No wedding.'

Gandhi called in the boy and told him: 'I don't want to force you to do anything against your will. I have spoken with all, and you are free from your betrothal.'

They all left. Gandhi turned to me and, before I could make any comment, he told me cheerfully and wittingly: 'According to the Hindu scriptures saving a cow's life is a work of great merit. Today we have obtained such a recompense, as we've saved an innocent calf's life.' He laughed wholeheartedly, and I could see that his smile stayed on his face for the whole day.

Gandhi had seen from the start that the one to be dealt with was not the bridegroom but the bride's parents. And he also saw that if he addressed them directly, he would get nothing, as they would think he was tackling them to save himself the trouble of having to convince the boy. That's why he first dealt with the boy, spent three days labouring with him, got his consent, placed it in the hands of the parents... thus obtaining the right to ask them to give up their stand. Once the boy had been convinced, Gandhi had in his hands the cards to convince the parents. He proceeded to do that with all patience, delicacy, respect for each one, giving generously of his time, and keeping always before his eyes the good of the only person who was not present in the meeting and whom all seemed to have forgotten, the girl condemned to marry an unworthy and rebellious young man, the "innocent calf' who perhaps never actually came to know who had saved her from the slaughter. For me, Gandhi's greatness, his intuitive knowledge of persons, his instant and exact judgment of facts, his persuasive skill, his readiness to wait, his wisdom and his humor shine out in one such simple episode more than in the resolution of crises on a national scale. He succeeded in the great causes because he knew how to succeed in the small ones.

Another secret of Gandhi's success in his work was delegation. He knew how to trust others, to distribute work, to make each one feel responsible and take as one's own each task entrusted to everyone, because one was left free to carry out the work as one thought best. That made all give of their best, set to work all their qualities, obtain results. Gandhi surrounded himself with the most valuable coworkers, and he made them work at their best.

When he began his education campus at Ahmedabad, he chose three men of the highest rate to lead it: Kakasaheb Kalelkar, Kishorlal Mashruwala, and Narhari Parekh. Education was of the utmost importance for Gandhi, and he kept regular meetings in person with the three of them to evaluate results and plan new projects. In one of those meetings he told them:

I want to make one thing clear. This school and this university are not mine but yours. People know me and trust me, and I am in charge of getting funds for this to go on. But that does not make mine the institution.

The advice I give you here is only advice. If you do not agree with it, forget it. Do whatever you think best without fear or hesitation. I'm not a teacher and I have no right to impose my ideas on you. I fully trust you.

This trusting attitude brings the best out of people and obtains far better results than the strictest control. The persons feel great when trusted and they bring out all their resources. There is a dangerous proverb in Gujarati that says: "Nothing grows under a banyan tree." The banyan tree grows high and wide, its roots spread far underground and monopolise all water and nutrients. Strong personalities do not allow anybody to shine by their side. Gandhi avoided this danger with his conscious policy of delegating, trusting, fostering initiative and independence. He told Manuben, young woman though she was: "I don't like anybody to do anything only because I like it." And when she did something different from what Gandhi had recommended and she gave her reasons for it, Gandhi praised her before all and said: "If all were to do like that, my work would become much easier."

Gandhi applied this delegation principle not only to practical action but to the ideas themselves. He delegated principles as he delegated projects. He wanted

everyone to develop one's own ideas for oneself instead of borrowing them from him. Kalelkar learned non-violence from Gandhi, and when he found himself in jail with him, he thought of making use of the occasion to refine the concept and to deepen the theory asking him questions and proposing his own doubts. He would think out situations, cases, conflicts, and ask Gandhi the concrete non-violent solution in each case. Gandhi at the beginning would answer him and explain how he would proceed in each case. But one day when Kalelkar came with his usual list of questions, Gandhi cut him short and told him:

You have taken the idea of non-violence from me. Now it is yours. Develop it in your own way. It is a living idea and it incarnates itself differently in me and in you. Don't ask me what I would do in each case. Rather think what you would do in it, experiment, examine, and draw conclusions on your own. For non-violence to take root in your heart you have to take it as your own and understand it and practice it in your own way. Don't ask me anymore about it.

He who had said, "the university is yours", now says, "non-violence is yours". He hands over his ideas as he handed over his institutions, and this is the way for both of them to grow. To trust, to hand over, to delegate. To make the work become personal, individual, accepted and assimilated. Winning people over by trusting them. Convincing by innocence. Gandhi was nobody's guru, and by doing so he became a master for all.

The proof that Gandhi truly wished for others to think on their own and follow their own lights is the fact that he also was ready to let himself be convinced by others and to change his opinion when others reasoned out things with him. He was not rigid or stubborn, but open and flexible, always ready to learn and to be corrected. Even in a matter as personal as his fasts unto death he knew how to take advice and even sometimes changed his own proposal in view of what his companions would tell him. This aspect of his is less known, and yet it is important in order to understand his complex personality. Gandhi knew how to yield. The following anecdote, less known as it is more intimate, which I

heard from Kalelkar's lips and I tell here in my own words, throws an unexpected light on Gandhi's character.

As a result of the non-violent protest in the Dharasana salt works, many peaceful demonstrators got seriously injured during the protest itself and in jail afterwards where the police did not cease beating them, sometimes brutally. Gandhi was told about those abuses when he was in the Yeravda jail, and he began to think what he should do in the situation. Kalelkar was with him in jail.

One day after the night's common prayer, Gandhi approached Kalelkar and told him: "I cannot bear being here quietly in jail as a political prisoner while out there the police are hammering our young people on their heads. I'm going to write a letter to the viceroy and to begin a fast unto death." "For how many days are you going to fast?" Kalelkar asked him with concern. "There is no question of days", Gandhi answered, "this fast is unto death. Life in these circumstances has no meaning for me."

Both remained serious and silent for a long while, and at the end Kalelkar told him respectfully: "Before you take such a decision I entreat you to listen to me. Don't think I'm butting in to save your life for my love towards you or for fear of death. I too want to think objectively and to tell you freely what I think. It is true that our young people are suffering. But it is also true that without such suffering we cannot free the nation. Freedom requires a blood baptism. It has always required it. What we have suffered till now is nothing compared to the sufferings at the time of the patriotic revolution in 1857. We have become too soft. We have lost the capacity and the nerve to see arms being broken and blood being shed. This is the first time blood is shed in our struggle. Let it flow. If every time they break someone's head you're going to go into a hunger strike, we'll never end. Suffering is hard, but it is suffering that gives us strength and unifies us. This is the price of independence."

Gandhi said nothing. He remained lost in thought and then retired. He never spoke of this matter again. There was no hunger strike. Nobody else came to know about this crisis, and the incident remained only in Kalelkar's memory.

For me this fast which actually did not take place is as important as those which did take place and which the whole world knows about. Gandhi's greatness showed not only in the way he knew how to convince others but in the way he knew how to let himself be convinced.

14. THE BRACELETS CAMPAIGN

"In imagination I became a woman in order to reach women's hearts." These are Gandhi's words. They reflect his noble effort to come to understand women, to appreciate their indispensable contribution to the life of the man and to the cause of the nation, and to enlist all the women of India in the movement of national independence. Women are not only half of humankind, but also as mothers, as keepers of the home, as educators and teachers by nature it is they that shape the mind, uphold tradition, foster belief. Gandhi had undertaken the huge task of training a whole nation, and for that he needed the inside cooperation of the women of India.

While seeking their cooperation he sought also their own improvement, their education, their progress. He identified with them to live out with them the problems and the injustices they suffered from time immemorial. The wrong but universal concept of "the weak sex", the inequality of rights as against men's rights, the widely extended though plainly false image that Sita in the *Ramayana* was Rama's mute and passive slave, the dowry system that humiliates woman, the prohibition for widows to remarry: all that he denounced and attacked in order to liberate, to raise, to educate women in freedom and dignity on equal terms with men. Free women for a free country.

To understand the reach of Gandhi's action we have first to remark on the particular situation of women in India due to the common concept and practice of the "joint family" system, according to which the son, on marrying, continues living in his parents' home, while the newly wedded bride leaves her parents' home and goes to live with her husband in her in-laws' home. That ensures the unity of the family, the stability of marriage, the care of the parents in their old age as they will always have with them in their home their children to look after them. The idea of leaving their parents alone by themselves, or even worse, in an old people's home, is contrary to Indian ethics. But if the "joint family" has such advantages, it has also a serious disadvantage that affects the woman in the deal. Each couple knows that their male children will remain

with them, will look after them, will see to it that nothing is lacking to them till their death, while their daughters will leave them, will go on to live in another home, to serve another family. The daughter is called from her birth, in a brutal expression, "foreign capital" *(parki thapan)* destined to pass on to other people's hands, while the son is "home capital" which means rent and benefit in payment for all that is done for him since childhood. This situation means that the birth of a son is most welcome, while this is not so much the case for a daughter's birth. The second of the sixteen sacraments of the Hindu liturgy *(punsanvanam)* is administered to the mother after conception *(garbhadhan)* and it consists in a sacred rite and an official petition that the coming baby may be a boy. I used to tell my Hindu friends that the rite is effective in about half the number of cases. The consequence of such a mentality, sadly common if not universal, is that the woman has to undergo the trauma of being born without being wanted, the regret of knowing herself to be a burden to her parents, and the pain of having to leave her own home and to live all her life under her in-laws. Indian women can take pride in the fortitude with which they have been able to face such an unfair situation.

The interesting point here is to see how Gandhi tackled this situation and found a way to reach the feminine public with his message of liberation for the whole nation, for all women and men. How to reach those people who could not come to see him as they had to remain at home, who did not listen to the radio as it was still unknown in poor homes, who did not read his publications, how to reach the millions of women in India's infinite countryside who performed their daily tasks in the faraway silence of their remote villages? What to ask from them that would be privately and intimately their own, a personal contribution that would bring them into the national struggle for independence while at the same time it would inwardly wake them up, stress their dignity, make them conscious of their worth, their rights, their equality with all in society ? The language of the sign, the symbol, the image, which Gandhi so masterly wielded, had to be particularly effective before a feminine imagination and sensitivity, but what symbol to use, what gesture to adopt, what image to project ?

Gandhi exacted some sacrifice from all classes and all persons, as he knew that giving out something, particularly something personal and valuable, is what commits the persons to the cause and makes them come forward with all their heart more than mere discourses or promises; but what to ask from those who have nothing personal to give, who have already committed all their work to their homes, from those who consecrate their full day to their family, who already sacrifice their whole life for their husband and their children ? To ask a housewife for her time has no meaning, as she already dedicates all her day to her duties and tasks at home, and any other work would take her away from her first and main responsibility to her family. Asking her for money has no meaning either, as she would have first to ask her husband for it. So, what sacrifice, what gesture, what contribution to the cause could Gandhi ask from the women of India, and how would that contribution help the growth and advance of those women themselves? Here is his solution in his own words:

To the women of India I'm asking, and I'll keep always asking, that they give me their gems and their jewelry, if possible all of it. Our women do not usually possess any money for them to freely dispose of it. Their true personal possession is their jewelry. They brought their jewels from their homes on marriage, and they wear them on their body as a walking capital till death. Now, people grow, advance and become nobler as they give of that which belongs to themselves, and so I ask the women of India to give their only personal possession, their jewels.

The jewelry most of the women among us wear is not a work of art, but rather a repository of dust and dirt. From a financial point of view they are a capital which is never used, which produces no interest, and which is wearing down with use, so that it is only a loss to the nation. Those big bracelets round their wrists and ornaments on their feet are a symbol of slavery as they are an ostentation in bad taste.

We are living in a time of sacrifice and purification, and I'm appealing to all women in our country to give me all their jewelry. My only condition is that they give it from the heart, give it with joy, and never again buy or wear any

other jewelry in their place. The money thus obtained will be used to improve the plight of the 'children of God' (untouchables) among us.

The big bracelets and silver pendants on wrists, ears, nose and feet are part of the home economy in rural India. They are the domestic capital safely kept and safely exhibited. In those remote and simple villages all over India there are no safes to keep jewels in and no banks to store them. The women keep their whole capital on themselves, they walk, work, sleep, grow with their bracelets on. The heavy silver pieces are an obstacle for work, a danger for health, and a temptation for thieves. Again, as they are also a necessary dowry for the woman's marriage, and therefore a matter for bargaining, they humiliate the woman when they ironically become the sign and symbol of her hopelessness and her slavery. In spite of all this, every woman loves her jewels and hates being deprived of them. Particularly in India where wrists without bracelets mean widowhood (when the husband dies, his widow has to publicly remove all her jewels), and widowhood, following the theory of reincarnation and *karma,* is a punishment in this life for extreme immorality in the previous one, and as such is the ultimate disgrace.

Gandhi approached that delicate question with firmness and clarity, and he asked of the women in India something they could do, something hard for them to do, and something that would ennoble them if they did it, would educate them and liberate them. The bracelets campaign. This, to me, was as genial and far-reaching a gesture as the salt march or the fasts unto death. Gandhi extended his hand, voluntary beggar for a cause, and asked along the length and breadth of India for alms of wrought silver, of feminine awareness, of popular upheaval. When travelling by train the unending miles of the Indian peninsula, the crowds waited for him at every station, where his train would stop; and where the crowds waited for him, the women were always a prominent part of that crowd. His message and his request had preceded him. Gandhi would lean out of the window in his car whatever the hour of the day or the night, would extend his hands without saying anything, and look at the women. In the Indian linguistic labyrinth they would not understand his words

and there was no need for that either. They saw his face, they saw his gesture, they understood the message and they rose to the occasion. The silvery rain would begin. Wrists and feet used from birth to the shining weight of the silver and gold saw themselves free for the first time from the false ornaments, the rough touch, the tyrannical habit of the absurd jewels. Then Gandhi would tell them:

If I had asked you for money, maybe I would have got more. But I wanted something that was your own, that would make you feel you were giving out something that belonged strictly to you. Money you could have asked from your parents or from your husband, while the bracelets are your own and the jewels are your own. When you give them you are giving something that is strictly yours, and you enter in person into the independence movement.

And one more thing. These jewels may be as shining as you wish, but they are a symbol of slavery. To reject them is to obtain freedom. I know many women who, on getting rid of their jewelry, have declared they felt truly free only when they gave them away.

Woman's ornament is her integrity, not metals or stones.

The greater part of those women had never got out of their villages, had not seen an Englishman or an American in their lives, were illiterate, did not know the history or the philosophy of the independence movement; but they knew full well that that man in front of them represented the country, that it was the time for sacrifice, and that they had given to him what they would not have given to anyone else because he too was going to do what no one had ever done before. Women all over India understood Gandhi, and they fervently and efficiently enlisted in the cause of freedom without leaving their villages.

Here is a case by which Gandhi himself was touched:

Gandhi was touring the Kerala province in South India, and in each village he would gather the women and ask them to give him their ornaments to help the untouchables as was his wont. In one of his meetings, a young girl of about

sixteen came forward to the dais where Gandhi was seated. Her name was Kaumudi. She approached Gandhi and asked him for his autograph.

It was Gandhi's well-known custom that when a woman asked him for his autograph he would willingly give it, and he expected the woman to remove there and then one of her bracelets and give it for the national cause. Kaumudi knew it, and without saying anything she removed one of her bracelets and gave it to Gandhi. Gandhi signed his name and was handing her the autograph, but meanwhile Kaumudi had removed the bracelet on her other wrist and was offering it also to him. Gandhi told her: 'No need for that. One autograph, one bangle.' But Kaumudi, without saying a word, had by then removed the gold necklace she had on. All people present saw it and hushed in surprise. Gandhi sweetly asked her: 'Do you have your parents' permission to do this?' As an answer, Kaumudi removed her earrings. People clapped. Kaumudi removed one by one all the ornaments she had on, placed them at Gandhi's feet and stood looking at him as though ready now to answer his questions. 'Have you asked your father's permission?' 'Yes.'

'And has he given it to you ?'

'Yes.'

'Have you asked also your mother's permission ?'

'Yes.'

'And has she given it to you ?'

'No!'

'But you'll convince her, isn't it?'

'Yes.'

Gandhi lovingly stroke her head and told her: 'Your generosity is your best ornament, far greater than all your jewelry', and let her go.

Gandhi liked this incident so much that that same day he wrote an article about it in his weekly *Harijan*. In it, after describing the whole scene in detail, he added: 'When women give me their jewelry I always put the condition that they

must not buy or wear other ornaments in place of the ones they have given to me. I have not expressly told Kaumudi about that, but I expect she knows it and will never wear any ornament anymore.'

But Gandhi was truth itself, and after writing that he realized he had no right to print that statement unless he checked with the girl first. He called her the next day and told her: 'Your sacrifice was admirable and I want other girls like you to know about it and to imitate it. To that end I've myself written an article in which I tell it all as it happened. But then I've added in the same article that you're not going to wear jewelry any more. That's why I want to ask you whether you are ready for that. If you're not ready, do tell me freely, and I'll change that paragraph.'

Kaumudi was going to answer, but Gandhi stopped her and added before she could speak: 'Think well before you answer. This is not just any unimportant point; it is a serious matter. If you promise, your promise stands for life. Now it is easy for you to give up ornaments, but remember that one day you'll marry, and the husband usually insists on his bride having ornaments and wearing them at the wedding. Some would even refuse a marriage without ornaments. What will you do then ?'

Kaumudi attentively listened to all that Gandhi was telling her. She stopped for a moment. She perfectly understood her responsibility. Finally she answered steadily and seriously: 'I will not accept as a husband a man who insists on my wearing jewelry.'

Gandhi happily smiled-and the article went to the press.

Apart from writing the article, Gandhi told that story in his talks many times as an example of independence, determination and sacrifice in a sixteen year old girl, and as a graphic summary of his appeal to all the women of India. He put his jewelry campaign to good use. He brought in the women in his fight for independence, made them realize their own dignity, taught them simplicity and cleanliness, led them to act on their own freedom, reminded them of the cause of the untouchables, and on top of it all he got a good amount of money for

that noble work and for the spiritual upheaval of the country. No goldsmith could have foreseen his jewelry could be put to such a high use.

This encounter of Gandhi's with feminine jewelry has some antecedents worth exploring. When he was leaving South Africa for India his friends and admirers offered him and his wife a good amount of jewels and ornaments of great value. Gandhi was by then already watchful to detect the meaning and the present and future consequences of all he did, and so he reflected on the matter. He himself tells us his reflections and the conflict they generated for him.

I soon realized I could not keep those jewels and ornaments. I decided that the next morning I would call my wife and children and tell them in all sincerity what I felt. Then I thought it would be difficult to convince my good wife, while convincing my sons would be easier. And so I decided to begin with them and then they would be the advocates of my cause before their mother.

The children understood me at once. I felt happy. Then I asked them: 'Will you now be able to convince your mother?' They answered me, 'Of course. That's our job. She is never going to wear those ornaments and we don't want them, so what is the use of keeping them? There will be no problem.' But I well knew there was going to be a problem.

They spoke to their mother, and then she came to speak with me: 'I understand that you don't want the ornaments, *and* neither our children want them. They are all men, and they do whatever you tell them. But think that some day these boys will marry. What then about our daughters-in-law? They definitely will want jewels. Who will give the jewelry to them ? And who knows what going to happen to us in the future ? Jewelry is insurance for the future. They have given them to you with sincerity and love. You cannot give them back.' And she burst into tears.

I told her gently: Yes, our children will marry at their time, and as they grow up they'll. do what they think best. We'll try not to choose for them fashionable women who may insist on jewelry. But if they will choose otherwise, here am I to get them as much as they want of it.'

'I know you well. Are you not the one who is not allowing me *to* wear jewels ? And are you going to buy then jewelry for your daughters-in-law ? You are already preparing the way by making ascetics out of them. I've said those jewels are not to be given back. This gold necklace they have given you is evidently meant for me. What right do you have over it ?'

'Have they given me that necklace for my services or for yours?'

'For yours. But without mine, what use would yours be? You've made me work day and night without end, and that does not count? You've made me cry, you've made me keep and serve in this house all the people you wanted. Is that nothing again? The work has been done by both of us, and the gifts now are for both of us. Those jewels have not to be given back.'

I must confess her words touched my soul. They were sharp arrows. But I wanted to give those jewels back by all means. After much talking I got her to agree reluctantly. I gave back all the presents.

I never repented for having done that. And I must say that with time my wife too came to see that we had done the right thing.

Gandhi, as usual with him, had first experienced in himself what he was planning to propose to others. He could ask all the women of India for their jewelry because first he had asked it from his wife. He knew about the importance of their possession and the difficulty of giving them up. He knew that was the way to involucrate the women of India, to lift them up, to wake them up, to get them to occupy their place of honor in the great task that was taking up his whole life and that would change his country's history. Gandhi, with unfailing intuition, knew how to integrate the women in the fight for an independent India. Tagore clearly remarks:

Even though Gandhi had as much horror of sex as the author of *The Kreutzer Sonata,* he didn't feel, as he did, contempt for woman as a source of passion. On the contrary, tenderness and affection in dealing with women was one of the most typical and noblest traits in his personality. A good proof of this is that many of his best and more faithful collaborators were women.

The author of the *Kreutzer Sonata* for violin and piano Nr. 9, Op. 47 in A major is, of course, Beethoven, but here Tagore has in mind the author of the novel with the same title, *The Kreutzer Sonata,* so he refers to Leo Tolstoy.

15. RUSTY COINS

Gandhi asked of Indian women their jewelry. What did he ask from the rest? He knew that the act of giving reinforced the commitment, the following, the identification with the ideal one is fighting for. And so he kept on asking. He asked of them all what they most priced, what was hardest for them to give, what was most personal and intimate, and converted the giver into a soldier, a volunteer, a free and integrated member of the country on the move. A campaign for renunciation, for sacrifice, for consecration to the national cause.

He asked those in the government's employment to give up their jobs. It is not easy to give up the job that provides for one's livelihood, but the government whom those employees served was a foreign government, and giving up its service was an act of protest and of freedom. Thousands of government servants understood it so, and they became ready to give up a safe job for a patriotic ideal.

He asked students in government colleges to give up their studies. This was easier, of course, and more dangerous, and Tagore himself became deeply worried at Gandhi's call. Would this not result in an illiterate generation? But Gandhi wanted also the young in his peaceful army, and he knew that their greatest ambition was to obtain a college degree as that guaranteed a job and gave social status. If giving up studies was easy, giving up a degree was the hardest thing a capable and ambitious young person could be asked to do. And Gandhi asked for that. And the classrooms were emptied. I count among my friends persons of great knowledge and culture who don't possess any academic degree: they were in college when Gandhi gave his call, they left their studies and they gave to Gandhi the best years of their lives; and they later made up on their own and learned and studied and became worthy and useful members of society.

He asked people to give up their addictions if they had any. Peaceful persuasion. Women picketed bars and wine shops. Alcoholic drinks were looked down upon in Indian ethics, and addiction to drink is a kind of slavery. Gandhi

and his followers professed abstention, and the new Indian independent government went later so far as to impose total prohibition. Again the gesture, the giving up something hard, the personal liberation from bondage.

What, then, would now Gandhi ask from those who had nothing to give? He asked well-to-do people to help the poor, but what will he now ask the poor to do ? They also had to be integrated in the great task of independence. They too had to contribute, to give something of their own, to give what they didn't even have, to become united, in their poverty, to the universal sacrifice, to the effort of the whole country. So Gandhi asked them precisely that, what they didn't have, what they themselves needed, what they could not afford to give, so that on giving it they would join the movement in full right, keeping their head high and on equal terms with the nation from its start. Gandhi, conscious of what he was doing and being the first to feel the pang of suffering in doing so, asked also the poorest of the poor for an alms for the country. Here is Kalelkar's touching narrative:

It was the year 1926. Gandhi had finished his South India tour among the patriotic enthusiasm of the crowds everywhere, and he now was in the North, in the region called Orissa. We arrived at a village called Itamati. Gandhi spoke to the people of the place, and then they began to bring whatever they could in answer to his appeal. One brought a cucumber, another some aubergine, others other vegetables. Some took out of the folds of the rags with which they covered themselves one or other small coin. I went through the crowd collecting whatever they were giving. The coins I took in my hands to keep them separate from the fruits and vegetables. Then on opening my hands I saw they were greenish. The coins had been kept long among the folds of the cloths and had rusted there, and now they had stained my hands with their green rust. I showed Gandhi my hands. I could not even speak.

Gandhi accepted the coins. Heavy price for an expensive freedom. More valuable than a millionaire's cheque. Patriotic relics. Nobility's jewels. A treasure for the funds of the national campaign. Gandhi suffered on accepting

them, and he did accept them as in his suffering he became one with the sufferers.

In his way of life and in his heart Gandhi identified with the poor. In his Ahmedabad headquarters he just lived on the floor in a simple open house that soon proved insufficient given his work, his visitors, and his meetings. The industry tycoon Janmalal Bajaj proposed to him building an upper storey for larger accommodation, and Gandhi was about to agree given the reasonableness of the proposal, but he at once reacted and answered him with feeling:

I am a child of the land. In my region, farmers literally live at earth level, they lay down on it, work on it, play on it. That's the way I too want to live. As a servant of the people I cannot break the contact with mother earth and go to live in a flat upstairs. I will always live in the little room in which I've always lived. It's a little uncomfortable, but in it I have the satisfaction of living at a level with my brothers and in contact with them.

Children were also attracted to Gandhi and flocked to him. They too were growing citizens in a country that was finding itself, they understood the earth language better than anybody, the gesture, the spontaneous anecdote that drew them to Gandhi. Here is an example:

Gandhi went once to visit a school. He loved children and knew how to come to their level and to speak with them and like them. He began telling them stories, and then he encouraged them to ask questions.

One of the children asked him with childlike innocence: 'Please, why is it that you don't wear a shirt?' And before Gandhi could answer, the child went on: 'If I ask my mother to stitch a shirt for you, will you wear it ?'

Gandhi seized at the opportunity. He was not going to let go of the occasion to teach his favorite lesson to such a docile and important audience as children in formation, and to do it in his own graphic, spontaneous, imaginative way. Following up his dialogue with the child he told him: 'Yes, of course. If your mother stitches me a shirt I'll wear it most happily.'

The child began jumping for joy, and all his companions clapped. Gandhi kept looking at them smiling but then he became serious as though he had suddenly thought of something he had forgotten, and added: But I have a little problem. See, I'll explain. If someone gives you a toy but gives nothing to your brothers, they feel it, isn't it? That's what happens to me. If your mother stitches a shirt for me but none for my brothers, they are going to feel it. Do you understand ?'

The child would not accept defeat so easily. On the contrary, he at once began to say with energy: 'That doesn't matter at all. I'll tell my mother to stitch a shirt also for each one of your brothers. Tell me, please, how many brothers do you have ?'

Gandhi let the question in the air for a while, smiled slowly and answered the boy gently and sadly: 'Your mother will have to stitch many many shirts, my son. Do you know ? I have four hundred million brothers.'

No lesson had been taught in the school so well as the lesson Gandhi taught that day. That child and all the other children could never forget it. Four hundred million brothers. All are our brothers. The poor are our brothers. We identify with the least of them. An early lesson, clearly and tellingly taught in that school that day. By nature and by vocation Gandhi was a teacher.

To two formal questions of a newsman, Gandhi gave answers with unsuspected depth:

'What is it that gives you strength in your life ?'

'The faith of the poor.'

'And what is what worries you most ?'

'The insensitivity of the rich.'

Kalelkar told me that the day he heard Gandhi give those two answers, he could not sleep the whole night.

16. THE SECRET OF NON VIOLENCE

"The basis of non-violence is shedding fear." "The first requisite for moral strength is fearlessness." "All the readers of the *Bhagavad Gita* know that fearlessness heads the list of the divine attributes of man or fundamental virtues which appropriately sum up the code of the noblest ethics and of the deepest spirituality to be found in its famous 16th chapter. Some commentators say that placing fearlessness on top of the list is only due to the meter used in the poem, while others rightly defend that the placing is intended and significant. Fearlessness always obtains first place in Gandhi's mentality and doctrine. Fearlessness is the essential basis for all the other virtues and qualities to settle on and to grow from it. We cannot search for truth or feel and express love without first getting rid of all fear. The Gujarati poet, Pritam, sung: 'The way of Truth is the way of the courageous: let weaklings not venture on it.' The courageous are those that have conquered all fear and wield the weapon of fearlessness instead of the swords and guns that only cowards bear."

In those words and in many other throughout his life, Gandhi valued the primacy of fearlessness, of courage, of total lack of any fear over any other moral attitude, virtue or human quality. That was the essence of his creed, the secret of his energy, the centre of his life. Fearlessness. Bravery. Courage. Being afraid of nobody and of nothing.

Neither in life nor in death. Neither of physical violence nor of moral threats. Among the vows the residents of Gandhi's institution *(ashram)* in Ahmedabad had to take and which I have mentioned before, the last one, which may have passed unnoticed and which I stress now, is the one of fearlessness, which is the summary of all the others. Conscious or unconscious, vague or concrete, subtle or intense, fear clouds perception, misleads decisions, weakens our strength. It is the deadliest of feelings and at the same time the most universal. It hinders our faculties, cheats our senses, degrades our life. Fear is the greatest obstacle to personality development and to the enjoyment of life. It hides in the recesses of our mind, in the depth of our heart, down to the last

cell in our organism. And then, paradoxically, fear generates violence. The animal attacks when it feels afraid. And so does man too. Cowardice takes refuge in violence. It is fear that makes man turn violent. Where there is serenity and self- confidence there is no violence. When Gandhi attacked fear he was attacking the root of violence, was setting the basis for self-respect and dignity, and was stressing the most important trait of the national character.

An early experience in his life had a great influence in Gandhi's thought and led him later to give so much importance to the freedom from all fear in life. As a child, just like all children, he was afraid of darkness. His *ayah* showed him the remedy: constant repetition of the name of God with his lips, his mind, and his heart. Rama, Rama, Rama. The traditional Hindu prayer, simple and deep, popular and mystical, pronounced with faith and spontaneously weaved into all the rhythms of life, walking, breathing, heartbeat. The lips move silently at the beat of the step, the pulse, the breath, so that the whole body prays and every movement becomes a prayer. In India I've observed a number of times in a crowded bus, in a waiting queue, in the boredom of a long visit, lips that move, fingers that count, rhythmical breathing which one guesses full of prayer, full of God. Once in an early winter morning in a lonely road in Mount Abu, Rajasthan, I saw a woman walking barefoot before me along the climbing path, dressed with a scanty sari in the early morning cold and balancing on her head a large weight of firewood to be sold in the market as it opened in town. As I drew near her and overtook her I noticed she was muttering something as she walked. I paid attention. It was the sacred name repeated rhythmically as she walked. Rama, Rama, Rama. The age-long secret of Indian spirituality had reached that simple woman in her village and was giving her strength, courage, and purpose in that cold winter morning. The Prayer of the Name, as it is called, is part of the Indian spiritual patrimony, and it came early into Gandhi's life by means of his *ayah*. Gandhi wrote years later:

When I was a child, my *ayah* taught me to repeat the sacred name of Rama whenever I was feeling afraid. With the passing of the years and the maturity in life, this holy custom has become a part of my organism. I can say without any

exaggeration that the Name is actualized in my heart, even if not always on my lips, twenty-four hours a day. It has been my salvation and my strength. In it I live and I stay.

Gandhi had subscribed to life insurance, but later he cancelled his subscription. "My life insurance is God" he said. When his life was threatened in South Africa, his close friend Kallenbach protected him and accompanied him everywhere with his revolver. Gandhi accepted his company on condition that he set aside his revolver. He repeated: "My bodyguard is God." He knew no fear. His own death at the hands of violence, open and defenseless before three murderous bullets, firm and steady to the end, was the paradoxical conquest and defeat of the very violence that was killing him. They could kill his body, but not his message, which on the contrary, would gain greater strength and credibility and universality with his death. Lack of fear disarms violence, and when this blindly follows its course, it shows how empty and useless it is, how incapable of achieving anything. Violence, on killing Gandhi, makes him immortal. It achieves exactly the opposite result. It defeats itself. Gandhi's murderers gave him his definite triumph. "Don't be afraid of those who can only kill the body." Gospel lesson hard to follow, but which Gandhi successfully put to a test in his life and his death.

Someone asked him whether he was not afraid of God's judgment. Gandhi answered with exemplary faith:

"For more than half a century I've been serving with all loyalty the Lord to whom I've consecrated my life. He has never let me down, not even in the darkest moments of my life. On the contrary, as I approach the end of my life I find greater joy in his service. Even among us a good master does not leave a servant without his reward. He too is a good master.

The Dominican philosopher and historian Fr. Regamey has said in our days that across the centuries there have been only two occasions in which Christianity has changed the course of history: the first one in the first century when the first Christians took Jesus's message seriously and spread it through Europe creating a mentality that influenced Western culture forever; and the second in

our days when Gandhi applied the innocent tactics of the *Sermon on the Mount* to the huge problem of his country's liberation from British power, and obtained Indian independence by peaceful means in such a way that it then became model and method for other countries to become independent without bloodshed, thus creating a new generation of peaceful activists who had learnt to fight their battles without violence. Stanley Jones has gone so far as to say that God used Gandhi to turn Christian again an unchristian Christianity. Few Christians have taken seriously the Christian precept of turning the other cheek. They take it at most as a utopic ideal, not as a practical injunction. It was Gandhi who put it into practice. Gandhi settled the historical fact that nonviolence is a practical commandment and an efficient policy. It is true that India has not been the peace paradise Gandhi dreamt of, and his own life ended in blood. But it cannot be denied that his doctrine and his life have contributed to shortening the spiral of violence of our troubled historical moment.

For the *Sermon on the Mount*, Gandhi had the highest commendation his sincere and fervent Hindu heart prompted to him. He wrote:

Today, if I were to lose my *Gita* and to forget all its contents, but I would have a copy of the *Sermon on the Mount* with me, I would derive as much joy and consolation from it as I obtain from the *Gita*."

Gandhi derived his non-violence from three sources: his Hindu tradition, Jain influence, and the *Sermon on the Mount*. From his Hindu tradition Gandhi liked to quote the example of the young saint Prahlad who is venerated all over Gujarat. He was the innocent son of a cruel father, half man half monster, known in Indian mythology by the name of Hiranyakashipu, who had declared war to the gods. When his son Prahlad declared himself to be a fervent devotee of Vishnu whose name he repeated without ceasing, his father forbad him to pronounce it and subjected him to all kinds of torments to make him give up his practice. Prahlad put up a valiant resistance with true non-violence, with "holding on to truth" as he demonstrated by steadily holding on to a phallic column when his father went to kill him. In the religious legend, the column split all down the middle, Vishnu appeared from inside it and protected his

faithful servant. Gandhi always said Prahlad had been his master in non-violence.

The other decisive influence on Gandhi was Jainism. The *ayah* who taught him not to fear darkness was a Jain, and the only person Gandhi asked for advice when he was under pressure from Christian friends in South Africa to become a Christian was *Kavi Rajchandra,* who was the greatest lay scholar on contemporary Jainism who had a great influence on the whole of Gujarat but is little known outside the region. The first Jain commandment is, "nonviolence is man's highest duty", and from it are later deduced all other commandments and regulations for personal and social behavior that make Jainism, in theory and in practice, a religion of the highest ideals and of exemplary austerity. The Jain monk is not only a strict vegetarian (never taking meat, fish, or eggs), which is fairly common in India, but he also takes care to sweep with a small broom he always carries with him the place on which he is going to sit down so as not to hurt any insect, he wears a small white cloth over his mouth not only to avoid inadvertently swallowing a mosquito where they are so abundant, but, more delicately, to avoid hurting the air with their breath as they talk, since the air is also alive with feeling and every word openly pronounced is an arrow that pierces its frame. During the rainy season the monks do not move outside in order not to hurt with their feet the water, another live creature of nature, while for the rest of the year they are pilgrims without a rest, not spending more than three nights in a place as a safeguard to their vow of poverty not being able to carry anything with them, and never using any kind of vehicle as its speedy motion hits the air and causes it pain. When an enterprising Jain monk was the first to board a plane at Bombay airport in order to go to America, a jet plane whose engines would torture the air in flight, the plane was surrounded by Jain faithful to prevent the sacrilege. When sleeping at night, in order to reduce to a minimum the passing possession of a few feet of ground while laying down, they keep their knees bent against their body, since taking up more space than is absolutely necessary is stealing, and stealing is violence. Jainism is similar to Buddhism and different from Hinduism, it

flourishes particularly in Gujarat, and it had a great influence on Gandhi, and through him on the whole of India.

The most typical teaching of Jainism, and the basis itself of non-violence, is the "principle of multiplicity" or "no singleness" *(anekantwad)* and consequently of the relativity of all knowledge. Each concept or object in human knowledge has not only one definition but many, however strange that statement may seem lo Western minds. This is traditionally represented in the old parable, first appearing in Jain sources, of the blind people who for the first time are brought near an elephant, touch it, and then each one describes the new animal as he has felt it. One says it is like a column (he had touched a leg), another like a wall (its side), another like a broom (tail), another like a hose (trunk), another like sharp horns (tusks), and yet another like a large fan (ears). Each one sticks to his description, they quarrel and come to blows. Lack of tolerance leads to violence. On the other hand, understanding, accepting one's own limitations, recognizing the complex reality and the remoteness of truth, and respecting other people's opinion creates mutual understanding, acceptance, and peace, and gives us a more complete knowledge of the object. No religion is exclusive, and all taken together take us nearer the exalted concept of God. Gandhi wrote in reference to the pressure some of his Christian friends brought on him in favor of Christianity:

My faith is based on as much tolerance as possible. This wide faith is my main support. I know some of my friends are a little put out by this and they find my position embarrassing. It is not so for me. I understand their view, but I stick to mine.

Violence comes out of fear and intolerance, and Gandhi painstakingly unmasked and conquered in his own soul these two enemies of life. He did not elaborate theories nor proposed any doctrine, but with his example and practice he showed the way of non-violence to a world in dire need of it. When someone asked him for a message to the crowds, he simply and truly answered: "My life is my message." Tolerance and fearlessness took shape in him, understanding everything and fearing nothing became his very life, and that life was his

message. In a brief declaration he made in the year 1947 he clearly shows his lack of all fear even before death, which by then was already stalking him without his knowing it, and he opens his heart in communion to all by calling God Rama (His Hindu name) and Rahim (His Muslim name). He wrote: Even if they kill me, I'll never cease to repeat the names of Rama and Rahim which for me mean the same God. With those names on my lips I will die happy. One year later, in the garden of Birla House in New Delhi, that prophecy became history.

17. LAST IMAGE

I've spent many years, the best of my life, in the city of Ahmedabad, capital of Gujarat, Gandhi's land. I've "drunk the waters of the Sabarmati river", local expression to describe the children of the land in their practical, peace loving, businesslike, affectionate character; I've walked daily through the streets on which Gandhi walked, I've sat of an evening on the sands near the river where Gandhi daily sat for his prayers with his companions. It was there he established his institution which he first called "Sabarmati Ashram" with the name of the river by its side, sacred river which, in Hindu mythology, is also invisibly present far away in the North-Eastern shore of India forming with the Ganges and the Yamuna the River Trinity *(Triveni Sangam),* and which goes underground till it surfaces again in the Gujarat plains. Later on, to honour the "children of God" as he called the untouchables for whose welfare he fought all his life, he himself changed its name to "Harijan Ashram" (Harijan = children of God, Ashram = abode). Nowadays it is simply referred to as "Gandhi Ashram".

The place was barren and deserted when Gandhi went to live there. Kalelkar tells how in his walks around, they used to explore the field towards the east on the fiver and the west with the last suburbs of the city, but they never ventured north towards the imposing walls of the district jail or south where the burial grounds and the cemetery lay. He himself good-humoredly goes on to say: "Later on, by the grace of the British government, we came to know what was at the north beyond the walls of the jail ..., and some day, by the grace of God, we'll come to know what is there towards the south behind the cemetery walls." On those sacred grounds Gandhi had a little house built, "The Tent of the Heart" *(Hrudaykutir)* where he dwelt with his wife. By its side there is now another house for volunteers and guests, a common dining room, and the open space on the river sand for the public prayer every day. Near it there is a Gandhi Museum, a library and a school, but The Tent of the Heart and the holy sand have been happily left as they were under Gandhi in a recent past which is already history.

I enjoy showing guests round the city I love, the streets, the walls, the temples, the mosques, the shops and the bazaars of Ahmedabad. The city boasts of the Hathisingh temple, Jain filigree in white marble, the Rani Sipri mosque, fervent devotion made into symmetrical geometry, the Calico Textile Museum, the prestigious Indian Institute of Management, and three buildings by Le Corbusier. All this has to be seen, and all this I show with pride and affection. But the most important place where I take my friends without hurry, on foot, with reverence, is Gandhi Ashram, the river side, the sand extension, the hallowed grounds. There we spend a while in silence, taking in the atmosphere and the memories of those sands, those trees, that river bend where Gandhi lived, sat, meditated and prayed to find himself and to find God. There I tell them the episode that took place on that very place and which pictures for us in symbol and image Gandhi's stand before force and violence:

It was the 10th of March 1922 towards evening. The viceroy had given orders to put Gandhi in jail. A police detachment came to the Ashram, they barred all the exits and a British officer entered the premises and shouted: "Let Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi come forward! He is arrested."

Gandhi came out at once and said: "I am ready. I need no preparation. I only would like to pray a few minutes."

The British officer stood perplexed as he was not used to that kind of request from people who went to jail. But he understood that there is a higher court than the viceroy's and he granted the petition.

That was the picture. On one side the police, tense and alert with their weapons at the ready, the standing officer impatiently watching all the movements of the people around; and on the other side Gandhi and his friends quietly seated on the sand at the riverside with their soul at peace and their lips at prayer.

A Hindu prayer was sung. Then a Muslim prayer. Also a Christian prayer. The name of Rama was rhythmically repeated by all. There was a brief silence. Gandhi stood up and went with steady step and a happy smile towards the British officer and the police van waiting for him.

The next day that picture was all over the country and all over the world. The police and the prayer. Weapons and peace. Frowns and smiles. The strength of weakness, the courage of yielding, the triumph of non-violence. Two mentalities face to face, material power and moral strength. Gandhi without fear. On his lips the name of God as uttered by Hindus and Muslims. Open to all and to everything. Without doubt and without prejudice. He has nothing to fear, he is nobody's enemy, he does not protest, he does not defend himself. By making himself totally vulnerable he paradoxically becomes invulnerable. He is taken to jail. He will go. And he will come out. One day he'll be killed. And he will live forever.

A few days before his death a relative of his went to see him in North India where he was in his mission of peace, and, on taking his leave, he lovingly invited Gandhi to return his visit going to his place in Gujarat when he would be able to. Those were bitter days. Violence was in the air. The sorrow of the India-Pakistan division weighed heavily on Gandhi's heart. He foresaw his approaching end, and saw it as violent. He answered his relative with sorrow at his leave-taking and with accents of a testament of faith:

Now I cannot come. Maybe I'll never be able to. This body is not going to last long. But it doesn't matter. When I go, it'll be only my body that goes. After my death I'll be closer to all of you. The body will go, but my ideals will remain.

Our times need those words of Gandhi to be true again.